Commentary

March 2000

Democracy for All?

James Q. Wilson

The New Enemies of Circumcision
Jon D. Levenson

Yeltsin—and After
Richard Pipes

Coming in With Their Hands Up—A Story
Joseph Epstein

Close Encounters of the Harvard Kind
Samuel McCracken

Missing Mary McCarthy
Midge Decter

American Opera in Progress
Terry Teachout

Exchanges: *Psychiatry Lost & Found / Buchanan's War*

Books in Review
Chester E. Finn, Jr. • *Carol Iannone* • *Daniel Pipes*
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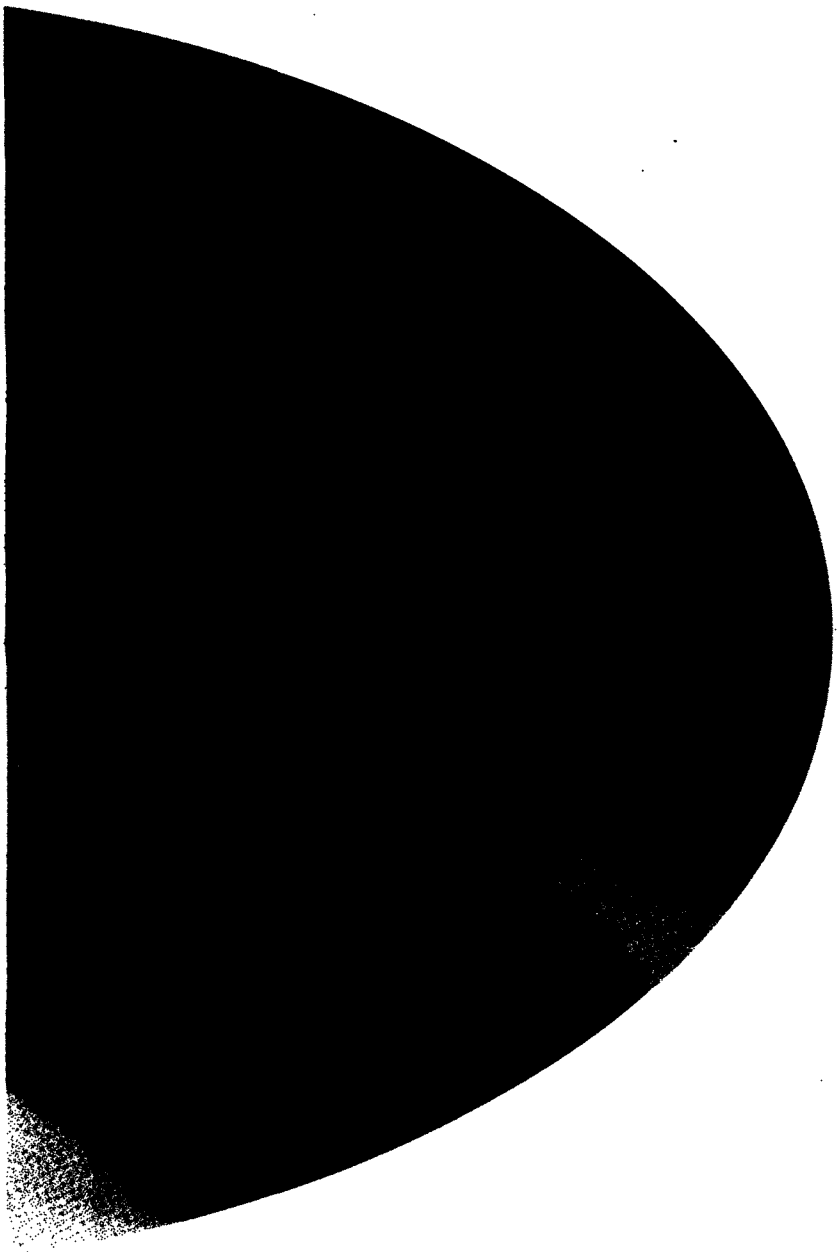

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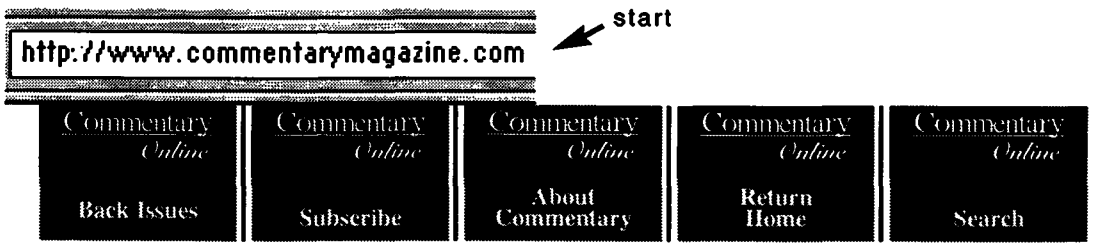

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Commentary
March 2000

Letters from Readers

Mental Disorder

To the Editor:

Paul R. McHugh's article ["How Psychiatry Lost Its Way," December 1999] criticizing recent changes in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) reminds me of the frustration that I felt during the twilight of the Freudian era. At the time, it seemed as if every psychiatrist who felt a touch of genius (and there were lots of them) was proposing a new and better theory of psychopathology and a diagnostic system to go with it. Those of us who were more interested in helping suffering patients than in new philosophies of mind had little reliable diagnostic nomenclature on which to rely.

The third edition of the DSM (1980) changed things radically for the better, because it did not require the clinician to intuit the diverse and mysterious forces that were supposed to lie "behind" clinical observations. What Dr. McHugh fails to mention is that the DSM groupings of these symptoms are guided by "external validating criteria." That is, each symptom-based diagnosis predicts a specific family history, clinical course, and/or response to treatment. After all, the major purpose of clinical diagnosis is simply to classify people in such a way that the clinician can predict which treatment is most likely to be helpful.

Dr. McHugh seems to have lost his diagnostic way, and I am concerned that in his role as an educator, he may be leading early-career psychiatrists out into the clinical badlands with him. As he accurately notes, the DSM is fraught with inconsistencies and the potential for misuse and abuse, and it is certainly unsatisfying as a philosophical document. But the DSM has taken the field of clinical psychiatry from the clutches of theorists who, in the absence of known physiological etiologies like those mentioned by Dr. McHugh—infection, neoplasms, etc.—spin arcane theories of diagnosis and then use those theories to justify or disqualify various treatments.

Roderick Shaner, M.D.
Los Angeles, California

To the Editor:

Although it is true that the causes of most psychiatric disorders are not yet fully understood, a system of classification based on phenomenological descriptions of the relevant disturbances in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors still offers useful "face validity," as well as the "reliability" that Paul R. McHugh extols. In addition, even if some of those who have constructed this classification system are guilty of self-promotion, as Dr. McHugh asserts, this does not vitiate the extensive field trials and other empirical support that are the basis for the diagnostic criteria of mental disorders.

The case of social-anxiety disorder, which Dr. McHugh cites as evidence of the speciousness of the current diagnostic system, may instead illustrate a point quite contrary to his thesis. Some people do indeed suffer excessively from anxiety or depressive symptoms, though they may not otherwise meet the criteria for disorders that Dr. McHugh surely recognizes. In my view, such individuals are still deserving of psychiatric treatment, just as a person with substantial but not excruciating chest pain is deserving of the services of a cardiologist.

The field of psychiatry values what Dr. McHugh calls "the richness of psychological diversity" even as it insists, as a matter of professional integrity and public policy, on the greater availability of treatment to those who needlessly suffer emotional distress. In this respect, psychiatry has not "lost its way," but, rather, rests on firm intellectual, spiritual, and moral grounds.

Brian Ladds, M.D.
New York Medical College
New York City

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TO THE EDITOR:

Paul R. McHugh praises the work of the psychiatrists at Washington University who strove to categorize mental disorders based on criteria established by empirical data, but he says that they merely achieved reliability (agreement on the presence of a disorder) and not validity (proof that a diagnosis truly represents an illness). Dr. McHugh ignores, however, the important work that members of this group did to justify categorizing a disorder as a true illness in the absence of a known etiology and mechanism of disease.

They gave five criteria: symptoms occurring together, a predictable course of illness, a predictable response to treatment, a family history of the disorder, and a biological marker. Only the few mental disorders for which we know the etiology and mechanism of illness have met all five criteria, but many disorders have met most of them. These criteria do not offer a foolproof method of validating disorders. But with all the imperfections of this system, Dr. McHugh cannot show an alternative that does a better job of prediction.

The official diagnostic schema of American psychiatry is based mainly on description with little reliance on speculative explanations. It is psychiatry's admission that it prefers to keep its ignorance in full view, not obscured by unproven explanations.

ARTHUR RIFKIN, M.D.
Glen Oaks, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

Paul R. McHugh takes us through the development of categorical thinking in the DSM over the past 30 years and correctly points out many of its pitfalls. But he ignores the field trials that went into making these categories. In psychiatry, as in every other area of medicine, symptoms are often classified diagnostically without a clear understanding of what causes them, and yet our therapeutic efforts still seem to relieve them.

This is not to allow for what Dr. McHugh calls "symptomatic push-button remedies" or to encourage the dangerous fantasy that "life's every passing symptom can be clinically diagnosed . . . and alleviated, if not eliminated, by pharmacological intervention." Rather, it is a humble effort to alleviate pain and suffering in the face of incomplete knowledge.

GARY N. COHEN, M.D.
Buffalo, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

Paul R. McHugh is right on the mark in many ways, but I believe he owes a much greater intellectual debt than he acknowledges to Dr. Thomas Szasz. Over the years, Szasz has articulated the following points that Dr. McHugh makes in his own article:

- that we are witnessing a proliferation of new, nonorganic, bogus psychiatric disorders;
- that in dealing with disorders, psychiatry substitutes reliability (agreement among diagnosticians) for validity (ascertaining whether diagnoses measure what they claim to measure);
- that in psychiatry, as opposed to somatic medicine, the symptom is the disease, rather than a sign of the disease;
- that there is collusion between some pharmaceutical companies and some psychiatric diagnosticians;
- that there is a profound element of self-fulfilling prophesy in the public positing of new psychiatric disorders;
- that changing someone's behavior with psychotropic drugs is not a valid indicator of psychiatric disorder because such drugs affect anyone who takes them;
- and finally—the one point for which Dr. McHugh gives Szasz credit—that "exercises in mental cosmetics should be offensive to anyone who values the richness of human psychological diversity."

From discussions with Dr. McHugh, I know of his distaste for Thomas Szasz, but this should not prevent him from citing the lineage of these important points.

RICHARD E. VATZ
Towson University
Towson, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

Paul R. McHugh complains that patients now come to the psychiatrist's office with their own diagnosis in hand, just wanting their doctor to write out a prescription. He blames this new attitude on changes in American psychiatry's classification system, especially on the DSM.

But Dr. McHugh overlooks the role of pharmaceutical companies, which now appeal directly to the public in the print and electronic media. Just about everyone has seen such advertisements, but very few people have seen the DSM. Moreover, some physicians now say that a third of their patients get medical guidance from the Internet.

RALPH SLOVENKO
Wayne State University
Detroit, Michigan

TO THE EDITOR:

More than a decade ago an editorial in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* commented on an international meeting of neuroscientists and looked forward to the world's achieving "Peace Through Mind-Brain Science." The editors' expectation was that the early diagnosis of mental illnesses and the use of modern psychotropic medications would eventually lead to the disappearance of human discord.

As a psychiatrist at a large urban hospital, I can offer the following data indicative of "progress" toward this goal. At present, each patient in our acute psychiatric inpatient unit is prescribed an average of five psychotropic medications, while each of our (several thousand) outpatients is prescribed an average of two such medications. It is elsewhere reported that psychotropic drugs comprise the majority of pharmaceuticals manufactured, sold, and consumed in this country.

Paul R. McHugh correctly describes modern American psychiatry. Whether it is a restless boy in a crowded classroom; a sulking, oppositional teen; or an overburdened and unloved mother, today's psychiatrists are like mental cosmeticians, ever ready to normalize chemically any example of "human psychological diversity" (in Dr. McHugh's phrase) that exceeds the current limits of social tolerance.

Dr. McHugh dwells too lightly, however, on what he calls the "fundamental obstacle to all students of consciousness": the "brain-mind problem." Modern American psychiatry behaves as if it had achieved an utterly materialistic explanation of

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human consciousness. The most flagrant example of this is the widely believed (but not proved) biochemical basis of depression. Millions of patients are labeled as if they had a well-understood brain disease called "depression." They are then prescribed powerful "antidepressants," which cause changes in the way they think, feel, and behave—but psychiatry knows not how or why.

Psychotropic medications do not really cure diseases in the way that, say, penicillin cures diplococcus pneumonia. They are more akin to aspirin, which will ameliorate any fever, whatever its etiology.

GARY ALMY, M.D.
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR:

Paul R. McHugh's criticism of psychiatry is on target, but I am not as optimistic as he is about the profession's ability to reverse itself and abandon the symptom-based diagnostic system that has taken root. This system serves two immensely important functions: it brings in a lot of patients, and it reinforces the biological reductionism that is necessary for psychiatry to remain a medical specialty.

Regarding this second point, a symptom-based approach allows researchers, clinicians, and patients to assume that abnormal biological processes underlie unpleasant emotional states. While this paradigm is probably valid for schizophrenia (though the disorder has yet to be related to any brain abnormality), it more often than not misleads patients.

Consider the case of major depression, a disorder that easily makes up half of any psychiatrist's practice. An estimated eighteen million Americans are said to be depressed at any given time, and those who have sought psychiatric treatment are likely to have been "educated" to believe that there is something wrong with their serotonin levels. I doubt, however, that there is one depressed person for whom it can be shown that this is the cause of his mental state. Yet, millions will continue to go from clinic to clinic, from one antidepressant to another, trying to correct their serotonin levels.

MICHAEL J. REZNICEK, M.D.
Lewiston, Idaho

TO THE EDITOR:

Thanks to Paul R. McHugh for his insightful exposition of the mischief created by the DSM. His article could not have been more timely, with Surgeon General David Satcher and his mental-health experts having just released a report claiming that one-fifth of the American public has a serious mental illness—a "crisis" that requires, in their view, a complete revamping of social attitudes toward the mentally ill and changes in the provision of mental-health services.

As Dr. McHugh points out, psychiatry has been perverted into a sort of shopping expedition in which the professional finds a picture that fits a patient and—*voilà*—an excuse to put another sad person on medication. He proposes a return to what we know: that some people have serious derangements, chemical and anatomic in nature, such as schizophrenia and manic-depression; that others are unhappy and dysfunctional because of poor social skills and a failure to adapt to their social surroundings; and that still others have acquired abusive and destructive habits.

This is a system we can actually use—elegant in its simplicity and in the systematic approach to therapies that it encourages. By contrast, today's mental-health diagnostic criteria are so loose that everyone could be labeled at least temporarily mentally disabled.

JOHN DALE DUNN, M.D.
Brownwood, Texas

TO THE EDITOR:

Paul R. McHugh's assessment of the current state of psychiatry resonates with many of my own experiences as a psychiatrist. For combat veterans, as well as for survivors of childhood abuse and victims of other traumas, we fool ourselves into thinking that we have identified a disease and are giving a specific treatment. I think of this as "neurology for dummies."

But this approach has become predominant for strong financial reasons. Managed-care companies, which in many places have achieved a chokehold on the practice of psychiatry, exert considerable pressure to confine psychiatrists to the role of medicating physicians. They prefer to allocate the functions of information-gathering, counseling, and psychotherapy to our colleagues in the allied mental-health professions—that is, those without medical degrees—because they are less expensive.

But psychoanalytic therapy is an essential part of psychiatric practice. Remove it, and what is left is simple-minded and boring and does not properly serve patients. Even in the managed-care world, where problem-solving with behaviorally measurable goals is mandatory, over 80 percent of outpatient therapy is psychoanalytical. Patients prefer and expect this. They do not feel well served by filling out forms, receiving prescriptions, and having their therapy restricted to manual-driven procedures. They want to be understood.

RONALD ABRAMSON, M.D.
Wayland, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

The problems created by the promiscuous writing of prescriptions for psychoactive drugs go far beyond what Paul R. McHugh was able to explore in his insightful article. The attempt to find the proper combination of medications can be more debilitating to the patient than the original problem.

I have watched several people go through an endless process of trial and (mostly) error with various combinations of medications. The drugs produce both side and interaction effects. Moreover, many people become habituated to the medications, so the dosages often have to be increased to produce the same punch.

The problem is the belief that there is a magic pill out there somewhere and we can find it if only we search long and hard enough. This mentality leads a patient to look to medication, rather than to his own behavior or lifestyle, as the primary agent of change in his life.

JENNIFER ROBACK MORSE
Hoover Institution
Stanford, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Many thanks to Paul R. McHugh for his description of the present state of psy-

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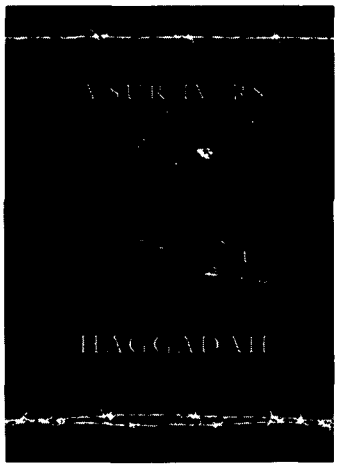

EDITED, AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY SAUL TOUSTER
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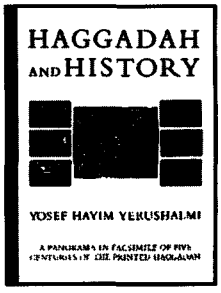

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chiatry. In the DSM, the potential symptoms of a disorder are often described in such general terms as, say, "impulsivity" or "failure to plan ahead." If a sufficient number of the symptoms are present, the diagnosis can be made. Needless to say, this sort of evaluation is highly subjective and often depends on the predisposition of the therapist making the diagnosis.

As a trial lawyer for a busy public defender's office, I often see the same behaviors described in radically different terms by different therapists, with correspondingly different diagnoses. A recent client was diagnosed by four different court-appointed doctors as suffering from, respectively, Adult Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Antisocial Personality Disorder, and Alcohol-Induced Anxiety Disorder.

Though judges, lawyers, and (increasingly) juries are skeptical of these psychiatric evaluations, I often see clients and their families clinging to a diagnosis as if it were the defining fact of their lives, an all-purpose excuse for their troubles. It is disheartening to think that some of these people might not be in trouble with the law if they had dealt instead with their real problems.

MICHAEL C. LUKEHART
Kern County Public Defender's Office
Bakersfield, California

TO THE EDITOR:

Paul R. McHugh describes the sea change that has occurred in American psychiatry during the past two decades as a result of successive editions of the DSM, and he is right to place part of the blame on the failure of Freudians "to advance [psychiatric] research." In the 1950's and 1960's, when Freudian psychoanalysts were the premier psychiatric educators, they did not promote the empirical investigation of psychoanalytic concepts and interventions. As a result, the field of psychiatric research came to be monopolized by those who were funded by the pharmaceutical industry, with its vested interest in finding "scientific evidence" for the effectiveness of its products.

Many potential patients had to be excluded from these studies because in real life people are very complex and few fit neatly into the narrow diagnostic categories required for testing. Moreover, the studies only evaluated the immediate response to these drugs, allowing them to be touted as "breakthroughs" despite growing evidence that their long-term therapeutic effects were often very limited. Traditional trials of antidepressants, for example, have typically run six to eight weeks, even though the disorder can last a lifetime.

Only genuine collaboration between psychoanalysts and psychiatric researchers can lead to progress in the assessment and treatment of mental disorders.

LEON HOFFMAN, M.D.
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Paul R. McHugh deserves all the support he can get in what may become a lonely and futile scientific struggle within the psychiatric profession. The crowd that believes "for every crooked thought, there is a crooked molecule" may eventually triumph, but at a lamentable cost.

The residents in psychiatry at Johns Hopkins are fortunate to have Dr. McHugh as a teacher and mentor. One hopes he has time to instruct them about the "richness of psychological diversity" that he rightly values.

D. M. COLLINS, M.D.
Tucson, Arizona

PAUL R. MCHUGH writes:

I thank my correspondents for their vigorous rejoinders to my essay and for the opportunity to amplify its thesis: that contemporary psychiatry has lost its way because of its overcommitment to a system of classification that banks too much on clinical appearances, blurs the crucial dis-

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tinction between reliability (consistency among diagnosticians) and validity (whether diagnoses represent actual disorders), and permits the proliferation of dubious diagnostic categories.

Roderick Shaner holds that "external validating criteria" such as "family history, clinical course, and/or response to treatment" are "predicted" by the DSM's categorical diagnoses. But where is such validating evidence for Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) or Chronic Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as they are conceived by the DSM? No family histories exist for these disorders. Their clinical courses are wildly unpredictable, and the responses elicited by treatment are disputed. Like several of my critics, Dr. Shaner decries "theory" in psychiatry, but vast quantities of theory are embedded (and shamefully camouflaged) in the DSM, and all of us are the worse for it.

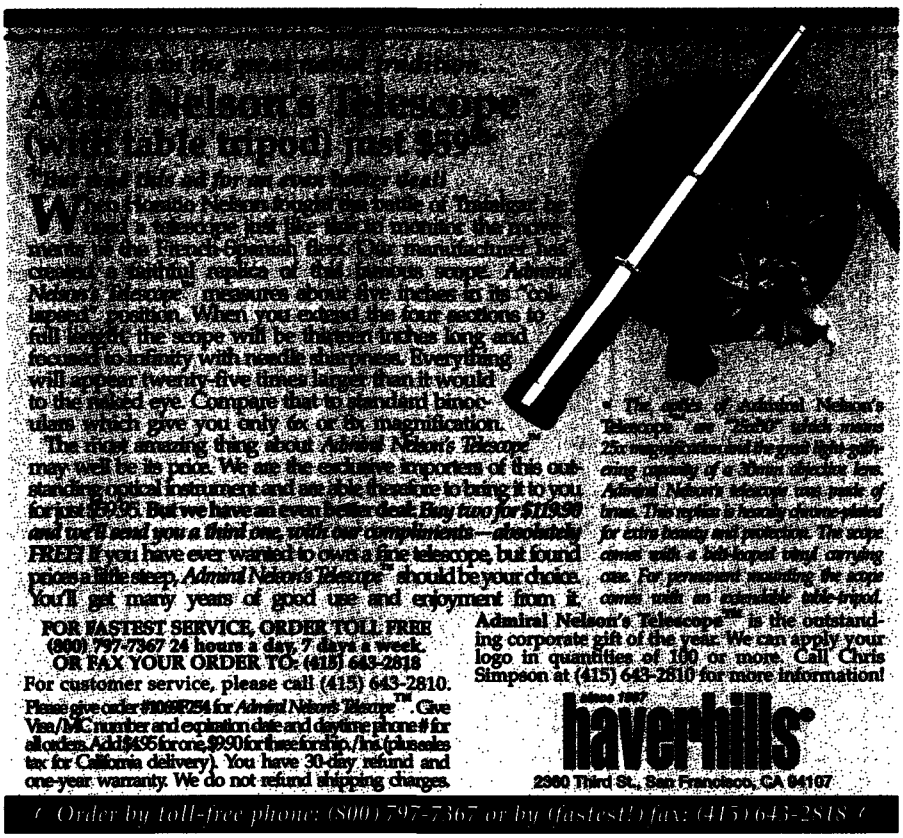
Brian Ladds suggests that "extensive field trials" and "phenomenological" descriptions provide "empirical support . . . for the diagnostic criteria" of the DSM. But Dr. Ladds is defending the method while ignoring the results. The field trials of the DSM prove only that instructed workers can employ its criteria reliably—that is, to reach agreement on the existence of "cases." These trials do not confront the issue of validity any more than did the witch-hunters of the 16th and 17th centuries, who were taught (also by means of official manuals) to apply empirical criteria in identifying their "cases." As the computer teaches, method by itself guarantees nothing: garbage in, garbage out.

Dr. Ladds believes that "social-anxiety disorder"—one of the diagnoses *du jour* promoted by the DSM—is a condition that calls for treatment. My objection rests not on whether someone with a fear of public speaking deserves help, but on whether such a problem rises to the level of a categorical mental disorder afflicting one in eight Americans—all of whom, it is suggested, should receive prescriptions for Paxil. For the introverted, anxious individuals who typically suffer from this problem, medication is useful in that it reduces their emotional responsiveness, but is does not specifically heal something called social-anxiety disorder.

Arthur Rifkin notes that the psychiatrists at Washington University mentioned in my article proposed various ways of confirming a category of psychiatric disease. But such validating criteria are satisfied by only a tiny minority of the conditions listed in the most recent edition of the DSM, and for many DSM categories the search for biological criteria is a bow to the false notion that we must seek a twisted neuron for every twisted thought. Despite claiming to be "atheoretical," the DSM encourages the presumption that all mental disorders are fundamentally biological, arising from problems in the structure or function of the brain. This is true in some cases, but in others, mental disorder is a product of the conflict between what a person hopes for and what life delivers.

Gary N. Cohen charms with his support of the "humble effort" to provide patients with relief from their suffering. I am on his side, but when a system of classification becomes a rationale for treatments that do not work (as in PTSD), for treatments that create addiction (as in Attention Deficit Disorder), or for treatments that misdirect efforts at recovery (as in MPD), then psychiatrists should think more carefully about what they claim.

Richard E. Vatz wants me to acknowledge that Thomas Szasz has been correct on occasion. I would do so more readily if it were not for the outrageous claims often made by Szasz, like his insistence that schizophrenia is a construct of psychiatrists in the same way that slavery was a construct of slaveowners.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My views may at times align with those of Szasz, but I deny any "lineage" from him.

Ralph Slovenko would have me pin some of the blame for psychiatry's plight on the aggressive advertising of pharmaceutical companies, but it is the conceptual world psychiatrists have engendered with their diagnostic system that has made both them and their patients so vulnerable to such promotions.

I agree with Gary Almy and Michael J. Reznicek about the overprescription of medications and the egregious error of thinking that relieving symptoms in this way confirms a diagnosis. Where we may disagree is on whether there exists, as I believe, a kind of depression (particularly of a bipolar form) that is, in every sense of the word, a disease—and one, moreover, deserving a considerable investment in biological research to find a "broken part," just as we have done with epilepsy.

I thank John Dale Dunn for his kind endorsement of my "system" of categorizing mental disorders. Though discussed only briefly in the article, this system is spelled out at some length in *The Perspectives of Psychiatry*, a book I co-authored with Phillip Slavney. Our basic argument is that the scientific study of psychiatric disorders must begin by recognizing that such disorders vary in their essence.

I certainly agree with Ronald Abramson that what patients most want is to be understood. He and Leon Hoffman write approvingly of psychoanalytic methods as the best means of achieving this understanding. In the department I direct, I appoint psychoanalysts primarily because of their skill at proposing meanings that comfort some patients. But I wonder—openly to them—whether their therapeutic skills depend upon the theories of human nature they champion or upon the long experience they have in developing an emotionally and cognitively supportive atmosphere for their patients—the latter being no mean feat, of course.

Jennifer Roback Morse and Michael C. Lukehart write as thoughtful observers of the psychiatric practices conducted under the DSM banner, and I am pleased that my article fit and illuminated their own experiences.

Finally, I am grateful to D.M. Collins for a wise and empathetic perception of my situation. I can report that, so far, I am weathering well and my pupils prosper.

World War II

TO THE EDITOR:

In his essay on Patrick J. Buchanan's recent book, *A Republic, Not An Empire* ["Buchanan as Historian," December 1999], Gabriel Schoenfeld starts off well enough by saying that "Buchanan's thesis"—that Britain's decision to extend a guarantee of security to Poland in 1939 was a major mistake—"should be accepted or rejected on its merits." Mr. Schoenfeld then proceeds to reject Buchanan's argument on grounds that are mostly irrelevant to the merits. His claim that "it is worth paying heed to [the] intellectual lineage" of Buchanan's ideas cannot remove the fact that the heed he does pay is old-fashioned ad hominem.

For example, the British historian A. J. P. Taylor, cited often by Buchanan in his book, is described by Mr. Schoenfeld as a "rabble rouser," a "muckraker," "an apologist for appeasement, . . . not only of the Soviet Union but also of Nazi Germany," "something of an apologist for Hitler himself," and a man with an "iconoclastic temperament." Moreover, Taylor's reassessment of World War II "led to considerable jubilation in Nazi and neo-Nazi circles in West Germany." Mr. Schoenfeld offers no evidence to support his portrayal of Taylor, nor does he attempt to show how these charges, even if true, are relevant to the merits of Buchanan's thesis.

Along the same lines, Mr. Schoenfeld spends considerable time knocking *No Clear and Present Danger*, a 1972 book by Bruce Russett that he describes as "a minor classic in the library of appeasement" and that supposedly supports Buchanan's views. But I do not believe that Buchanan cites Russett anywhere in his book. Similarly, Mr. Schoenfeld attacks David Irving, an established and well-respected historian, calling him a "Holocaust denier" and a "positively eager" champion of the neo-Nazi cause. Once again he offers no evidence to support his charges or attempt to show how they are relevant to the merit of Buchanan's perspective. And once again, I do not believe Buchanan cites Irving anywhere in his book.

On the question of Britain's guarantee to Poland, Mr. Schoenfeld argues that Buchanan "ties himself in knots" trying to reconcile two conflicting opinions: (1) that Hitler concluded that the Allied war guarantee to Poland was a bluff and (2) that the Allied guarantee was taken so seriously that it impelled Hitler to seek a deal with Stalin. Since in Mr. Schoenfeld's view these "small pieces do not fit together," therefore, "neither does the bigger picture." Let us see.

Britain's guarantee presented Hitler with a problem: could he move into Poland without being challenged? True, Britain had done nothing to prevent him from militarizing the Rhineland or from annexing Austria, the Sudetenland, and most of Czechoslovakia, and probably would not act in this case, either. But he could not be sure. There was a possibility that Britain would form an alliance with Russia, thereby presenting a serious obstacle to an invasion of Poland. Therefore Hitler had to neutralize Russia; hence, the German-Soviet nonaggression pact of August 1939. After the pact was signed, Hitler became more doubtful of the likelihood of intervention. Buchanan's presentation of all this is straightforward, conventional, internally consistent, and knot-free.

Mr. Schoenfeld has Buchanan insisting that the USSR was a "far greater long-term threat than Hitler's Germany," and that there was no reason for the U.S. to prefer a Soviet to a Nazi victory. In fact, Buchanan does not say either of these things. Rather, he simply presents his (correct) understanding of U.S. public opinion in mid-1941: "To many Americans, Stalin's Russia . . . was a far greater long-term threat than Hitler's Germany." As for his own view, Buchanan clearly thinks that both powers were evil and that they

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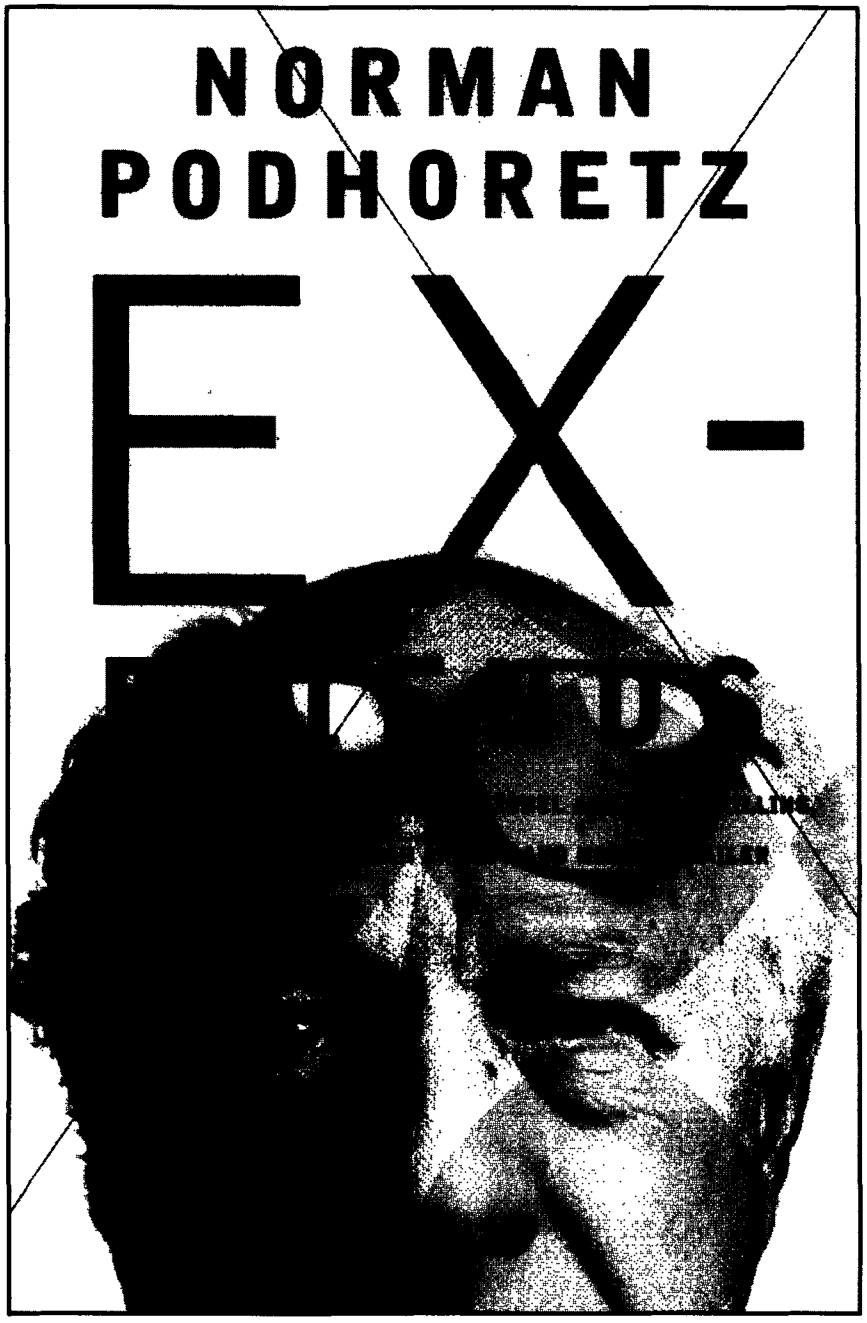

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should have been allowed to "fight each other to a frazzle," in the words of Hanson Baldwin, the *New York Times* military expert whom Buchanan quotes.

Mr. Schoenfeld, of course, believes that there were many reasons for preferring a Soviet to a German victory. But in making his case, he points almost exclusively to the atrocities committed by Germany during the entire war, atrocities that, for the most part, had not occurred by mid-1941 and hence could have played no part in the speculations of the American public at that time. He also attempts to minimize the evil nature of Soviet Russia by noting that even many of "Stalin's victims . . . understood what was at stake" in the contest between Germany and the USSR, and fought "desperately to stave off the Nazi onslaught." In other words, Hitler was so horrible that Russians would have rather been victims of Stalin and would even fight for that privilege.

In his classic history of Russia, Nicholas Riasanovsky wrote:

> The fighting spirit of Soviet troops varied greatly: certain units fought heroically, while others hastened to surrender . . . . Even more significantly, the Soviet population often welcomed the Germans. This was strikingly true in the . . . Ukraine and White Russia, but it also occurred in Great Russia regions near Smolensk and elsewhere. After a quarter of a century of Communist rule many inhabitants of the USSR greeted invaders, any invaders, as liberators.

Perversely, Mr. Schoenfeld does not even hint at the existence of the Russians described by Riasanovsky. As for those of "Stalin's victims" who fought against the Nazis, they did so for all the reasons that men have always fought: fear and hatred of the enemy, love of country, obedience to their leaders, fear of punishment, etc. It should also be kept in mind that roughly twenty million of Stalin's victims were not fighting against Hitler in 1941 because they had already been killed by the Communists. Is Mr. Schoenfeld indifferent to those people?

Buchanan argues that "[I]f the revealed horrors of Nazism in the east mandated a war, the Allies could have chosen the time and place to strike." For this, Mr. Schoenfeld accuses him of "disingenuousness at its height," but what is he saying? That Buchanan is unaware of Nazi atrocities? That is preposterous. Buchanan's meaning is quite clear (and well stated): if, after watching Germany and Russia slug it out, the Allies believed that a war was necessary (in terms of their interests), then they could have selected the time and place to strike. Such an "America First" policy obviously offends Mr. Schoenfeld because Hitler was hugely evil and ought to have been opposed for that reason. Would he also argue that America ought to have gone to war against Russia because of its even greater atrocities? If so, when? If not, is he not once again guilty of indifference to Stalin's victims?

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In the end, Mr. Schoenfeld implies that Buchanan's "America First" program is amoral and that its source is an anti-Semitic "corner of Buchanan's mind." There you have it. One of the oldest debates in American foreign policy—in Buchanan's words, "the vision of Washington or the temptation of Wilson"—is reduced to anti-Semitism, or Whatever War The Good Guys Want To Fight Today.

HANK HOOVER
Alexandria, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR:

If a German victory over the USSR might have put enormous resources at Hitler's disposal, the Soviet victory, we must remember, put those same items at the disposal of the Communists, with dire consequences to follow for decades. At the same time, German control and victory over so large a nation as the USSR would surely have distracted and weakened the Nazis and given the rest of Europe more time to prepare for war. Buchanan's main point is that America would still have been out of Hitler's reach.

It is almost farcical to draw Hitler's warmaking machine as a real threat to the United States. Germany is not a seafaring nation, and it could hardly have manned or supplied the vast French, Russian, or Italian armadas Mr. Schoenfeld thrusts threateningly in our faces, even assuming these fleets contained more than mediocre warships or were not scuttled first. Germany never gave any real attention to long-range bombers, either. As John Keegan notes, the Luftwaffe was entirely a medium-range force.

Mr. Schoenfeld questions Buchanan's assertion that by 1950, "Americans were asking what [World War II] had all been for." Yet no lesser a figure than William F. Buckley, Jr. mused not long ago over the dismay Americans felt when they saw that one tyranny in Europe had been overthrown only to be replaced by another. Indeed, the USSR became a superpower that killed millions and gave life to the North Korean, Chinese, and North Vietnamese Communists, who in turn slaughtered tens of millions. The West had to fight this power all over the globe for 45 years, usually losing, and suffering hundreds of thousands of casualties, not to mention the loss of prosperity and liberty that always accompanies war. Is Buchanan justified in speculating whether there might have been a better outcome? Absolutely. Does he make a plausible argument? Yes.

Of course, no COMMENTARY article dealing with Buchanan would be complete without a dark insinuation of bigotry. It is too bad that the magazine's writers must assume that only evil can oppose their views, a form of argumentation I thought only rabid liberals practiced.

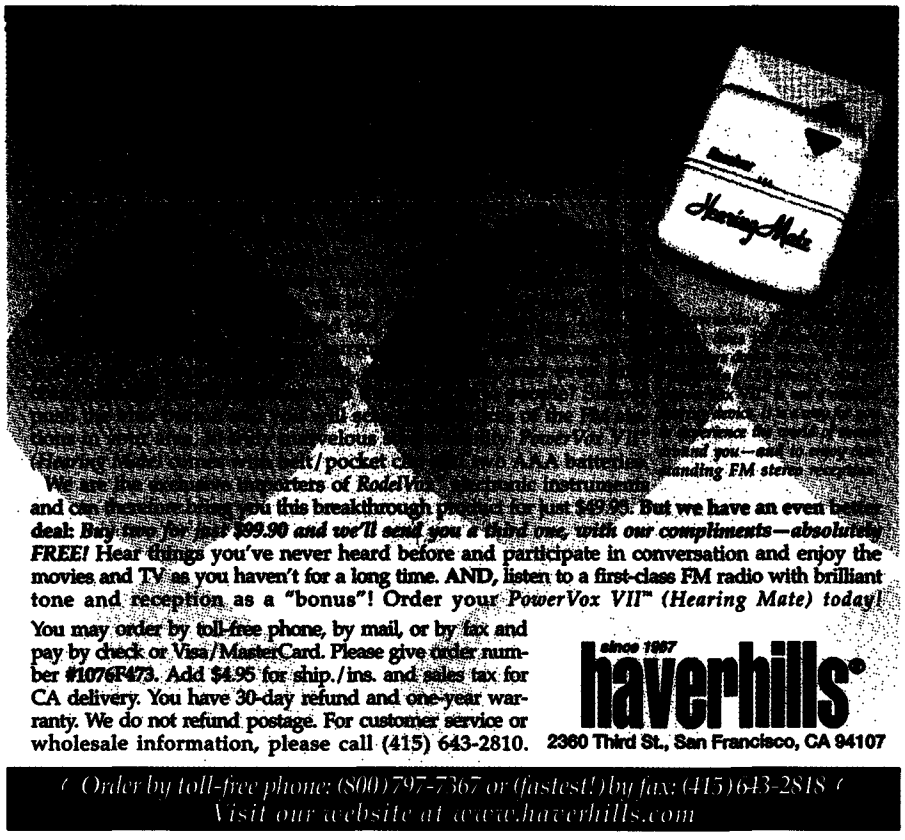
ROSS NELSON
Casselton, North Dakota

TO THE EDITOR:

Patrick J. Buchanan has postulated that if Britain had refrained from declaring war, Hitler would have concentrated his efforts on Russia and the East and not on the West. The possibility of a Nazi-Soviet "stalemate" is debatable, but given Russia's vast distances and primitive terrain, the chances are that Buchanan is correct and that the two worst totalitarian threats of our century would have destroyed or, at least, badly crippled each other.

Buchanan's sin is that this conclusion ignores the Holocaust, and, certainly, such a terrible event would not be allowed today. The past is not the present, however, and it is very unlikely that a neutral America would have gone to war over the Holocaust, of which very little was known, in any case, until after the war.

Jewish Americans can take pride in the constant media publicity concerning the Holocaust since World War II, which has gone a long way toward changing older anti-Semitic attitudes.



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The Golan Heights

To Whom Do They Belong? Can Israel Survive Without Them?

Syria's president, Hafez Assad, has apparently "consented to discuss peace" with Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak, provided that Mr. Barak agrees to start negotiations where (allegedly) the late Prime Minister Rabin left off four years ago. Astonishingly and regrettably, Mr Barak seems to have agreed to this presumptuous imposition.

What are the facts?

Historical Background—The Golan was always part of the Jewish homeland. The Syrian claim to the Golan is tenuous. Syria, as a political entity, did not exist at all until after the first World War. Until then it was just another province in the Ottoman empire, with ill-defined borders. In 1923, in an Anglo/French great-power play, the border between Syria and what was then called Palestine was established. The Golan Heights were ceded to Syria.

Even before the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Syrians, having heavily fortified the area, subjected the villages in northern Israel to almost daily shellings, making normal life impossible. In the 1967 Six-Day War, Syria attacked Israel and was defeated. Israel occupied the Golan Heights and in 1981, for all practical purposes annexed them.

Syria and its President—Syria is the most destabilizing influence in the Middle East. It is classified by the U.S. State Department as a narcotics-dealing and terrorist state. Its main fury is directed against Israel, which is perceived as a bulwark of Western influence and civilization, both of which Syria totally rejects.

Syria's President, Hafez Assad, is a tyrant, every bit as ruthless and cunning as his Iraqi counterpart, Saddam Hussein. Under Assad, Syria is a world center for terrorism. It still harbors Nazi bigwigs, who found welcome there after the World War. Few doubt that he was the mastermind and final authority in the suicide attack on the Marine barracks in Beirut in which 241 Americans died, and in the explosion of Pan Am flight #103 in which 270 people lost their lives. He oversees one of the largest narcotics operations in the world.

Military Security—The Golan is the size of the New York borough of Queens, about 10 miles wide, with a plateau on either side of a ridge. If it were part of Syria it would be less than 1% of its territory. But it is of a supreme strategic importance to Israel. Its high ground provides early-warning capability, without which Israel–just as in 1948, in 1967, and in 1973–would be subject to surprise attack by the Syrians. Its loss would obligate Israel to stay on constant alert and to maintain a state of readiness and mobilization that would be economically and socially untenable. The Golan, which ranges up to a height of 2300 ft., dominates the Jordan Valley, the lowest point on earth about 700 ft. below sea level. On the Golan itself, there are only two natural terrain bottlenecks through which tanks can advance. Those choke points are defensible and made possible the repulse of 1400 Syrian tanks that attacked Israel in the 1973 war. But with the Golan in Syrian hands, and without the radar installations that would give Israel warning of any military movements, thousands of tanks–backed up by missiles and airplanes–could overrun Israel in a matter of hours. It would be a strategically impossible situation, especially for a country as small as Israel–smaller than Lake Michigan, smaller by half than San Bernardino County in California. The Golan does not make for perfect defense, but it gives Israel a small breathing space for mobilization.

> "With the Golan in Israeli hands, attacking Arabs could be confident of defeat and peace would be preserved. To hand the Golan to Syria is a prescription for war and for Israel's destruction."

The Golan is the source of over one-third of Israel's fresh water. In 1964, with the Golan in Syrian hands, Syria attempted to divert these headwaters and to cripple Israel's water supply. It is more than likely that, given another opportunity, Syria would once again attempt to destroy Israel's water supply.

In its keen desire to bring peace to its people, after more than fifty years of war and bloodshed, Israel has been prepared to make far-reaching concessions to Syria on the Golan, in exchange for real peace. But it is hoped that even Ehud Barak, Israel's recently-elected prime minister, will not be prepared to give up all of the Golan high ground and to return to the "death trap" borders of 1967, or anything close to them. In order to survive within such borders, Israel would have to rely on the goodwill of the Arab states, most of which—with the recent exception of Jordan and of the cold peace with Egypt—are still in a declared or undeclared state of war with Israel. An aggressor will attack only if confident of victory. With the Golan in Israeli hands, attacking Arabs could be confident of defeat and peace would be preserved. To hand the Golan to Syria is a prescription for war and for Israel's destruction.

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But a possible reaction is now occurring as the American people, who did not participate in the Holocaust, grow tired of the publicity and wonder if it is not, like most repetitious media messages, exaggerated.

Buchanan's second sin is his criticism of the Israel lobby. While Israel is, of course, of natural interest to Jewish Americans, it is still revealing how billions of U.S. taxpayer dollars go to Israel each year without any debate in Congress and little or no discussion in the media. This stands in sharp contrast to American aid to other countries.

WILLIAM H. RIDDELL
Tampa, Florida

TO THE EDITOR:

After Japan attacked the U.S. in 1941, would the U.S. have entered the conflict in Europe if Germany had not first declared war on us? William L. Shirer thought not. There was no political will in Congress for a second war, and our armed forces wanted to take on only one enemy—Japan.

Did Germany pose a threat to the U.S. in 1941? Certainly not an immediate one. To envision a German fleet approaching the east coast seems improbable after one considers the terrible problems encountered by the Allies simply in crossing the English Channel in 1944. The idea that a German trans-Atlantic bomber of the time could have made a nonstop round trip is absurd.

Was there a moral imperative for us to go to war against Germany for its savage behavior in Europe, or against Japan for its savage behavior in China? Perhaps, but we reacted only after an attack by Japan and a declaration of war by Germany. Having somehow gotten into two wars, neither of which would have passed a national referendum, we should ask how all this happened and whether it was a good thing.

Is Patrick J. Buchanan a "revisionist," as Mr. Schoenfeld describes him? No, but he is an effective gadfly.

JOHN N. BUCKLEY
West Des Moines, Iowa

TO THE EDITOR:

In September 1944, Allied troops liberated the little piece of the Netherlands where I grew up. Notwithstanding terrible destruction and civilian casualties, we were fortunate in avoiding the starvation that would kill tens of thousands further north during the harsh winter of 1944-45. It was not American troops that liberated us, but Canadians and Poles. A number of memorials and a statue in the town of Axel commemorate their sacrifices. In light of those sacrifices, one wonders about Britain's sincerity in vowing to go to war for the sake of Poland, when in the end the Poles were delivered to the tender mercies of Joseph Stalin.

As for Patrick J. Buchanan's view that Hitler had benign intentions toward Britain, it must be noted that the Germans drew up extensive plans for that country's subjugation and the wholesale removal of the population (similar plans were made for the removal of the Dutch population to Poland). In the fall of 1940, the Netherlands became one of the staging areas for an invasion of Britain; a motley collection of confiscated Baltic fishing boats and barges was turned into landing craft.

Though there is much to disapprove of in Buchanan's views, I wish that those who reject them would refrain from labeling simple factual statements as hateful or anti-Semitic. Buchanan's reference to the youthful Hitler as "an individual of great courage, a soldier's soldier in the Great War" is a case in point. Gabriel Schoenfeld decries the statement but, in fact, reputable historians agree on Hitler's performance. During World War I he served as a dispatch runner on the Western front, showing utter disregard for personal danger. He was twice wounded, and twice decorated with the Iron Cross, the second time first-class, which was unusual for a common soldier.

WIM DE VRIEND
Coos Bay, Oregon

TO THE EDITOR:

I enjoyed reading Gabriel Schoenfeld's timely comments on Patrick J. Buchanan. It is relevant to note that England and France did not dare go to war with Hitler. The only action they took after the German invasion of Poland was to send Hitler a *declaration* of war. It was Hitler who, eight months after he finished off Poland, attacked them in spite of their timorous attitude.

Not that the delay in the assault was driven by caution or fear on Hitler's side; it was only because of his hesitation over how to proceed. Hitler's mind and soul lay in waging wars, endless wars, constant wars. He spent his days and nights bent over maps, playing ceaselessly with his colored pencils while drawing "bold" military actions under an endless array of operational codenames.

Stalin, on the other hand, had no military ambitions and regarded himself as a "social thinker." Having gained power over a huge country by means of subversion, treachery, and deceit, by sowing dissent and perverting time-honored values and ideals, he and his henchmen were always afraid that the methods they used to gain power would be turned against them. Hence, Stalin spent most of his energy spying on comrades, "weeding out" potentially disaffected elements, and destroying them and their kin.

When the hour of decision came, it became clear to the leaders of the free nations that it was not Stalin but Hitler, the bloodthirsty predator, who had to be slain by the sword.

BENJAMIN J. FRYDMAN
Madison, Wisconsin

TO THE EDITOR:

Gabriel Schoenfeld performs an excellent and commendable service in demolishing Patrick J. Buchanan's revisionist theory that the United States did not need to enter World War II. In a one-front war, Hitler would have smashed the Soviet Union. It is also very conceivable that an unchallenged Nazi war machine would have developed battle-ready atomic weapons, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and jet fighters.

Although Mr. Schoenfeld presents the military and diplomatic arguments successfully, I found his lack of consideration of the Holocaust a bit disturbing. Adolf Hitler was a genocidal monster who turned human beings into lampshades; you can only deal with a person like Hitler by destroying him utterly.

DANIEL MCLANE
Plainview, New York

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TO THE EDITOR:

Gabriel Schoenfeld is to be congratulated for his article debunking the account of World War II offered by Patrick J. Buchanan and his fellow revisionists. Still, in his attempt to rebut Buchanan's assertion that the Soviet Union posed a greater threat to the West than Nazi Germany, Mr. Schoenfeld partially overlooks the true extent of Stalin's crimes.

Less than a decade after the Nazi Holocaust, Stalin planned to murder the four to five million Jews of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, thereby completing Hitler's work. By 1953, Stalin had prepared killing grounds and the logistics for a mass extermination of the USSR's Jews, who were to be deported to camps in Siberia where, upon arrival, they were to be shot and then buried in ditches. Only Stalin's timely death in March 1953, several weeks before the second holocaust was to be set in motion, prevented his plan from being carried out.

PETER EMANUEL GOLDMAN
Surfside, Florida

TO THE EDITOR:

Gabriel Schoenfeld's informative and important article will likely not alter the views of persons who applaud Patrick J. Buchanan's beliefs. I have known some, and no matter what facts are presented to them, they maintain their position: Communist Russia was the real enemy and should have been destroyed; Hitler might have destroyed Russia had the U.S. not intervened; and the situation of the Jewish people in Germany was unfortunate but basically irrelevant. Buchanan's political ambition becomes all the more frightening when one is aware of his supporters beyond the obvious "crazies."

ELLEN SEHGAL
Chevy Chase, Maryland

GABRIEL SCHOENFELD writes:

To understand a historical event of any consequence, one must examine it from at least two angles. The first of these is the contemporaneous: how matters looked to those who were in the midst of them. The second is hindsight, which offers the tremendous advantage of knowing how things turned out even if the very clarity thereby gained clouds our sense of the immense imponderables faced at every step by those caught in the flow of events.

From the contemporaneous perspective—and only if one turns a blind eye to the significant number of anti-Semites and Nazi sympathizers among them—one could perhaps be somewhat charitable to the members of the America First Committee who opposed America's entry into World War II. It is not hard to comprehend a reluctance to send American troops to fight and die in faraway lands when our shores are not immediately threatened; and, as more than one of my critics point out, the scope and scale of Hitler's atrocities in the early phases of the war were neither fully understood nor as great as they were to become by 1942 and 1943 when the death camps were in full swing.

But from hindsight—and again ignoring anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi sentiment and focusing solely on the America Firsters' opposition to U.S. intervention in Europe or the provision of "aid short of war" to embattled England—a far less generous assessment must be levied. We now know better than ever how close a call was victory in World War II. We now know, too, the full extent of Hitler's crimes, and what would have happened to the peoples of Western Europe and England, of Eastern Europe and the USSR, and ultimately of South and North America, if the Nazi dictator had not been resisted with all our might. Indeed, there are few questions on which history has rendered a more unequivocal verdict: from our present vantage point, members of the America First Committee look, at best, like dangerous fools.

What is truly remarkable, therefore, about some of the letters I have received in response to my article is that today, almost six decades after the America First Committee was compelled to close its doors in disgrace after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the ideas it represented live on as if preserved in amber, untrammeled by the horrors of Nazism and the peril Hitler posed to the entire world.

Let me begin my reply to individual correspondents by squarely facing the charge leveled by Hank Hoover and Ross Nelson that I engaged in an ad-hominem attack when I examined the origins of Patrick Buchanan's views and located them in the work of other well-known World War II revisionists. My intention was not to find Buchanan guilty by means of association but merely to engage in the entirely legitimate enterprise of tracing influence, an essential task in any serious history of ideas. That Buchanan finds himself with such strange bedfellows as A.J.P. Taylor, Bruce Russett, and David Irving is hardly my fault, and those who reprimand me for bringing this fact to light are merely shooting the messenger. Indeed, in his eagerness to pull the trigger, Hank Hoover does not hesitate to distort my words. For the purpose of tarring Buchanan, he says, I disparaged A.J.P. Taylor as a "rabble rouser" and "muckraker." But I was far more respectful to the iconoclastic British historian than that. A.J.P. Taylor, I wrote, was regarded "*by his admirers*" as a "*marvelously high-toned* rabble-rouser/muckraker" [emphasis added]. Readers can judge for themselves whether I have been fairly quoted.

It is of course true that Buchanan does not cite the works of Bruce Russett or David Irving in his book, and I never claimed otherwise. Had I wanted to smudge Buchanan with the sources he actually employs, that would have been easy enough. I chose not to primarily because many of them are extremely obscure.

Buchanan relies, for example, upon the work of Ralph Raico, a professor of "social-studies education" at Buffalo State College in New York who has devoted a portion of his career to toppling Winston Churchill, a figure of somewhat greater stature than his own. The statesman who did more than anyone else to rescue Europe is, to Raico, "a man of blood and a politico without principle," one who "served to corrupt every standard of honesty and morality in politics and history." Churchill's conduct of the air war against the Nazis, Raico writes, amounted to a "campaign of murder"; its chief result was the destruction of Germany, where

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a "thousand-year-old urban culture was annihilated." Needless to say, Buchanan treats Raico as a leading authority, drawing upon his "scholarship" without offering an iota of criticism or a demurral of any sort.

In impugning Churchill with words that should properly be applied to Adolf Hitler, Raico himself relies on the work of his fellow World War II revisionist David Irving, whom in my article I labeled a Holocaust denier. Hank Hoover objects to this appellation, complaining that I adduced no evidence. But Irving's views of the Holocaust have not exactly been hidden from sight, except perhaps from those who do not wish to see them.

Here, for example, is an excerpt from one of Irving's lectures on the subject of whether Auschwitz—where more than a million Jews were murdered in gas chambers—was ever used by the Nazis as an extermination camp:

> It's baloney, it's a legend. Once we admit the fact that it was a brutal slave-labor camp and large numbers of people did die, as large numbers of innocent people died elsewhere in the war, why believe the rest of the baloney?
>
> I say quite tastelessly, in fact, that more women died on the back seat of Edward Kennedy's car at Chappaquiddick than ever died in a gas chamber in Auschwitz.
>
> Oh, you think that's tasteless, how about this? There are so many Auschwitz survivors going around, in fact the number increases as the years go past, which is biologically very odd to say the least. Because I'm going to form an Association of Auschwitz Survivors, Survivors of the Holocaust and Other Liars, or the ASSHOLS.

This is the man whom Hank Hoover regards as a "an established and well-respected historian."

Still, Hoover and my other correspondents do offer a number of additional arguments that deserve consideration, if only to dispose of them. Thus, disagreeing with my assessment of Buchanan's failed effort to explain the impact of England's Polish guarantee on Hitler's foreign policy, Hoover offers a brief synopsis of Hitler's diplomacy and then asserts that Buchanan's account is "straightforward, conventional, internally consistent, and knot-free." I would agree that Hoover's own summary is entirely unexceptionable; the trouble is that it is hardly congruent with the polemical muddle offered by Buchanan. In that muddle, logic and historical evidence are tossed overboard in the attempt to indict Great Britain for "impelling" (Buchanan's word) Hitler to attack westward into the low countries and France.

I am hardly unaware that the soldiers of the Red Army fought for a variety of motives and that in the initial phases of the Nazi invasion, large numbers of Soviet citizens welcomed the German forces, in the words of

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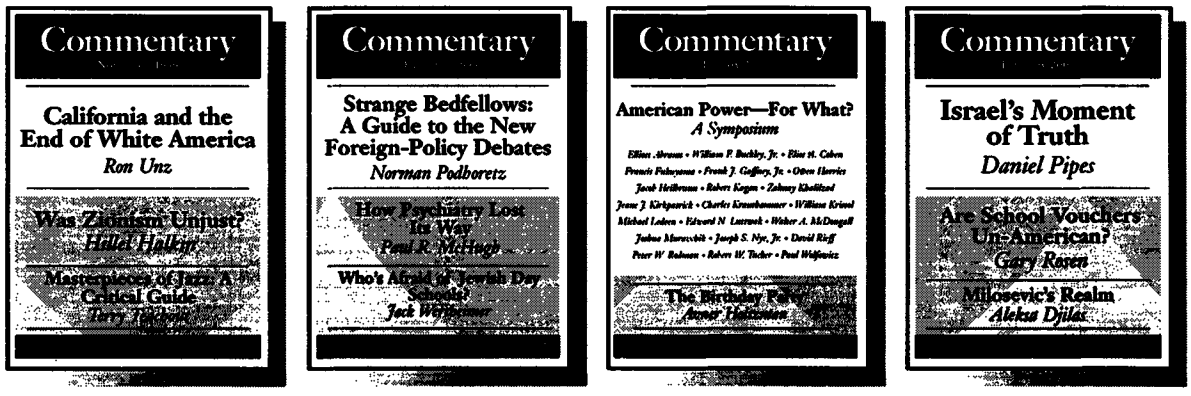

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the historian Nicholas Riasanovsky, as liberators. One could go further and note that the Germans might well have won the war had they treated the subjugated peoples of the USSR with a modicum of decency. Given the nature of Nazism, however, this was not to be.

Still, it is difficult to see what is perverse about my assertion "that millions of Soviet peasants, after experiencing the brutalities of both sides at first hand, chose accordingly, and fought desperately to stave off the Nazi onslaught." This is a statement of fact, one supported by all the leading authorities, including Nicholas Riasanovsky himself. Hank Hoover, who appears to have a habit of quoting selectively, fails to include Riasanovsky's words on the process by which the Nazis' "beastly treatment of the Soviet population . . . turned friends into enemies."

A number of my correspondents question the wisdom of America's wartime alliance with the Soviet Union. In my article I offered reasons why an alliance with Stalin was both necessary and morally defensible, and I will not repeat myself here. Nor is there any need to reargue the question of whether our own shores were directly threatened by Hitler, except to note that my critics, like Buchanan himself, appear unwilling to discuss the possibility that a Germany unopposed by the United States could well have acquired nuclear weapons. Their silence on this linchpin issue, if not deafening, is loud enough.

My critics also pass over a number of other points I raised, including Buchanan's habit of indicting Franklin D. Roosevelt as a scheming liar while taking Hitler's words as the gospel truth, not to mention the implications of Buchanan's long record as an "effective gadfly"—to borrow John N. Buckley's euphemism—on behalf of Nazi war criminals. But *I* cannot pass over some of *their* observations, especially William H. Riddell's half-patronizing, half-snide remark that "Jewish Americans can take pride in the constant media publicity concerning the Holocaust," and his complaint that the sin for which Buchanan is really being pilloried is "criticism of the Israel lobby," which manages to funnel billions of "taxpayer dollars" to the Jewish state "without any debate in Congress and little or no discussion in the media."

It would be nice to think that this sort of baiting (to use a mild term) is a thing of the past. But evidently it is not. Still, it raises an interesting question of its own. Is it an accident that World War II revisionists, like Buchanan himself, so often have what can only be called (to use another mild term) a Jewish problem?

Criticizing Islam

TO THE EDITOR:

Daniel Pipes struck a sympathetic chord with me ["'How Dare You Defame Islam?'," November 1999]. I had the temerity some years ago to publish a short op-ed piece in the *Washington Times* about certain aspects of Islamic doctrine. I mentioned the well-meaning Christian idiots who were parading around Beirut at the time in T-shirts inscribed with an apology for the Crusades, and offered my tongue-in-cheek approval, suggesting that the Islamic faithful might like to join in with an apology for invading Palestine, the Maghreb, and Southern and Eastern Europe. I further suggested that murderous fundamentalist terrorists were impervious to apology or compromise, and were enemies not just of the West but of humanity itself.

The response from one Hussein Ibish, media director of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, accused me of a McCarthyite witch hunt and of "grotesque fabrications" that had "a genocidal quality reminiscent of the most bizarre passages of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*." No personal threats were included in this screed. Perhaps I was lucky. But it did provide confirmation of the paranoia described by Mr. Pipes.

It may also be worthwhile noting that when a Muslim fundamentalist in my city called for the famous *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie to be carried out by the faithful in England, the British Crown Prosecution Service shrank from indicting the man, though he had clearly and publicly violated a British law against incitement to murder. This is only one example—and not the worst—of the many instances in which the authorities in Britain have bent over backward to propitiate even the most vicious and bigoted in the Muslim community. It does raise the question of just where tolerance shades into foolishness.

HERB GREER
Manchester, England

TO THE EDITOR:

I can attest from personal experience to the accuracy of Daniel Pipes's article. A few years ago, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) cared enough to vilify me for a passing observation along the lines of "Yes, Virginia, there were (and are) Arab slave traders" in my book refuting the Nation of Islam's lies about what it calls "the secret relationship between blacks and Jews."

But Mr. Pipes should have been less reticent about the facilitating role of CAIR's credulous, cowardly, or complicitous fellow travelers in the media and academe. He points out, for example, CAIR's denunciation of the *Atlantic Monthly* for publishing an article on Islamic fundamentalist violence in Sudan. He does not mention, however, the hit piece in the same magazine's July 1999 issue attacking Christian Solidarity International's campaign to end the Khartoum regime's slave raids in the non-Muslim southern Sudan. A cheap enough price for the *Atlantic* to pay for immunity from further intimidation by CAIR?

HAROLD BRACKMAN
San Diego, California

TO THE EDITOR:

In his fascinating article on Islamic extremism, Daniel Pipes states: "Nor has this campaign been limited to Muslim-majority countries. Makin Morcos, also an Egyptian, was killed in Australia for criticizing the Islamists' anti-Christian campaign in his native country." As an Australian, I was struck by this comment, since I would certainly have remembered such an event.

After I could not find any reference to it, I contacted one of the largest and most prestigious newspapers in Australia, *The Age*, but an

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electronic search of all Australian newspapers found no mention of the incident. A historian at the Australian National University was also unable to find anything. Could Mr. Pipes please supply some details?

BERNARD ZIMMERMANN
Melbourne, Australia

DANIEL PIPES writes:

Herb Greer's experience with Hussein Ibish is by no means unique. To take just one example: within days of Yitzhak Rabin's death, Ibish called the late Israeli prime minister "a monster, a war criminal, an ethnic cleanser, a mass murderer, and a terrorist." About Yigal Amir, Ibish then approvingly wrote that assassinating Rabin had made him an "unwitting and unwilling instrument of justice."

Harold Brackman points to a real problem: some of those who speak out about Islam and Muslims and are lambasted by CAIR subsequently find that prudence is the better part of valor. Henceforth, they choose to remain quiet on these subjects. But he is wrong to accuse the *Atlantic Monthly* of such weakness. Well after the *Atlantic* was criticized by CAIR for running an article on Islamist violence in the Sudan, the magazine took up the hyperdelicate issue of the Qur'an's origins, which also elicited a critical response from CAIR. Moreover, if Mr. Brackman were to look more closely at the *Atlantic* article to which he refers—on slavery in the Sudan—he would find that however wrongheaded its attack on Christian Solidarity International, it offered little solace to the Sudanese authorities; the author takes for granted their complicity in the slave trade and then asks if the best way to combat that trade is through the redemption of slaves. I fully accept what Cullen Murphy, the magazine's managing editor, told me: "The idea that anything we've published has been with an eye to placate or offend is preposterous—we've never done that."

Bernard Zimmermann finds no data about the murder in Australia of Makin Morcos: my own information derives from R.E. Burns's *The Wrath of Allah* (Houston: A. Ghosh, 1994), the dedication of which reports that Morcos was "shot by unknown assailants" in Sydney on the night of April 12, 1991 and that he died fifteen days later. According to Burns, "The fifty-eight-year-old father of four had received death threats following his criticism of Islamic terrorists harassing and murdering Copts in Egypt."

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Defending Zion

TO THE EDITOR:

Much of what Hillel Halkin says in "Was Zionism Unjust?" [November 1999] is profoundly disturbing. He states, for instance, that Zionist leaders repeatedly lied to their followers and to the world at large about the necessity of "dispossessing" the Arabs in Palestine because, if they had told the truth, their support would have disappeared. At the same time, he refers repeatedly to the "intrinsic justice" of Zionism—but without explaining or defending that justice.

Halkin also states flatly that "without an independent homeland in Palestine the Jewish people had no life in our time." I refuse to accept this implicit evaluation of American Jewish life, especially when it is offered by an Israeli who apparently has no conception of the rewards, both material and spiritual, that Jews have received in our country, including lessons like pluralism and opposition to theocracy that Israelis have not yet learned.

DAVID M. BLANK
Pleasantville, New York

TO THE EDITOR

It is all very well for Hillel Halkin to call for textbooks that demonstrate to thirteen- and fourteen-year-old Israelis the intrinsic justice of Zionism and the compelling necessity for a Jewish state. But who will write them? The current minister of education, Yossi Sarid? Or the

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countless other Israeli intellectuals whose belief in the intrinsic justice of a Palestinian Arab state is far more powerful than their belief in the justice (or necessity) of a Jewish one?

The curse of Israel, as Midge Decter pointed out a few years ago, is its premature development of an intellectual class. I have often been asked by Jewish audiences whether, among all the other forms of anti-Semitism that flourish in Israel, Holocaust denial has taken root. My answer has been a cautious "not yet." But this is probably because the ever-widening tendency of the Israeli Left to refer to the Arabic *naqba* (catastrophe) of 1948 as a Holocaust and to their own (nonleftist) countrymen as Nazis would not carry much punch if the "original" Holocaust had never happened at all.

EDWARD ALEXANDER
Seattle, Washington

TO THE EDITOR:

I slept better after reading Hillel Halkin's "Was Zionism Unjust?" He restored the pride I have felt since childhood in the incredible events surrounding the establishment of the State of Israel. He forcefully demonstrated that the "new historians" do not succeed, after all, in dimming the light of Israeli heroism in 1948 and 1967.

But my gratitude is not strong enough to dispel my reservations about the second half of his article. The real problem with the new histories, he tells us, is that their cool detachment robs the young Israeli of "identification with his people or his country." Gone is the affect that breeds loyalty and devotion—"the excitement, the tremendous emotion, the joy and the tears, . . . the dizzying sense of a dream unbelievably come true." But is it really the confident and committed tenor of the storyteller that ultimately provides legitimacy to Zionism's claims?

Rashi, the most famous of Jewish biblical exegetes, once asked: if the Torah is primarily a legal work, why does it not begin with the laws and statutes? Why start with the story of Creation? Because, he answers, "If the nations of the world say to Israel, 'You are bandits, for you conquered the lands of the seven nations,' Israel can say to them, 'The whole earth belongs to the Holy One, Blessed is He. He created, and He gave it to the one who is proper in His eyes.'"

If Israeli children are going to believe in the Zionist idea, they are going to have to sink roots in a history that goes back much farther than 1948. For millennia, Jews predicated their tie to the land of Israel upon confidence in the veracity of the biblical narrative and their divinely ordained mission to the world. Ironically, it may have to be religion that saves secular Zionism.

[RABBI] YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN
Los Angeles, California

HILLEL HALKIN writes:

David M. Blank should read more carefully. Nowhere in my article did I claim that Zionist leaders in the British Mandate period deliberately "lied to their followers" about the need to "dispossess" Palestinians. Rather, I wrote, they lied to themselves in thinking that a Jewish state could be established in Palestine without the Palestinians going to war to stop it. And as for my "conception of the rewards" of American Jewish life, I can only say that, having been born and having spent my first 30 years in the United States, I am neither ignorant of its culture nor in need of lectures about theocracy or pluralism. It is hard to please American Jews like Mr. Blank. If the Israeli government were to announce tomorrow that it was scheduling Knesset meetings on Jewish holidays and introducing pork into army kitchens, such Jews, far from applauding its newfound pluralism, would no doubt deplore its abandonment of Jewish values.

It is not clear to me what future age Edward Alexander thinks would have been more appropriate for the development of an intellectual class in Israel. It certainly is true that most Israeli intellectuals lean to the Left today, as do, I daresay, most intellectuals in America. But I might remind Mr. Alexander that one recent minister of education was the late Zevulun Hammer of the National Religious party, whose views are far from Yossi Sarid's, and that the same Israeli electorate that brought the Right to power in 1996 is perfectly capable of doing it again. Giving up the battle for lost is no way to win it.

Rabbi Adlerstein thinks religion may yet save secular Zionism. Perhaps. The other half of the picture, however, is that secular Zionism may save religion—and particularly the ultra-Orthodox brand of it that has traditionally been anti-Zionist. One of the most encouraging developments in Israel in recent years has been the formation of the first volunteer ultra-Orthodox combat units in the army, drawn from a population that has shunned military service in the past. If the ultra-Orthodox community ever gains the moral maturity needed to realize that it is a ***hillul hashem***, a scandalous blot on Judaism, to expect to be defended with the lives of secular Jews whom it is unwilling to defend in turn, Zionism can take all the credit. And if this community also learns to shoulder its share of responsibility for the general welfare of the society in which it lives and by which it is today heavily supported, it may yet come to be regarded as a spiritually credible force by the many Israelis who now are repelled by its selfishness and hypocrisy.

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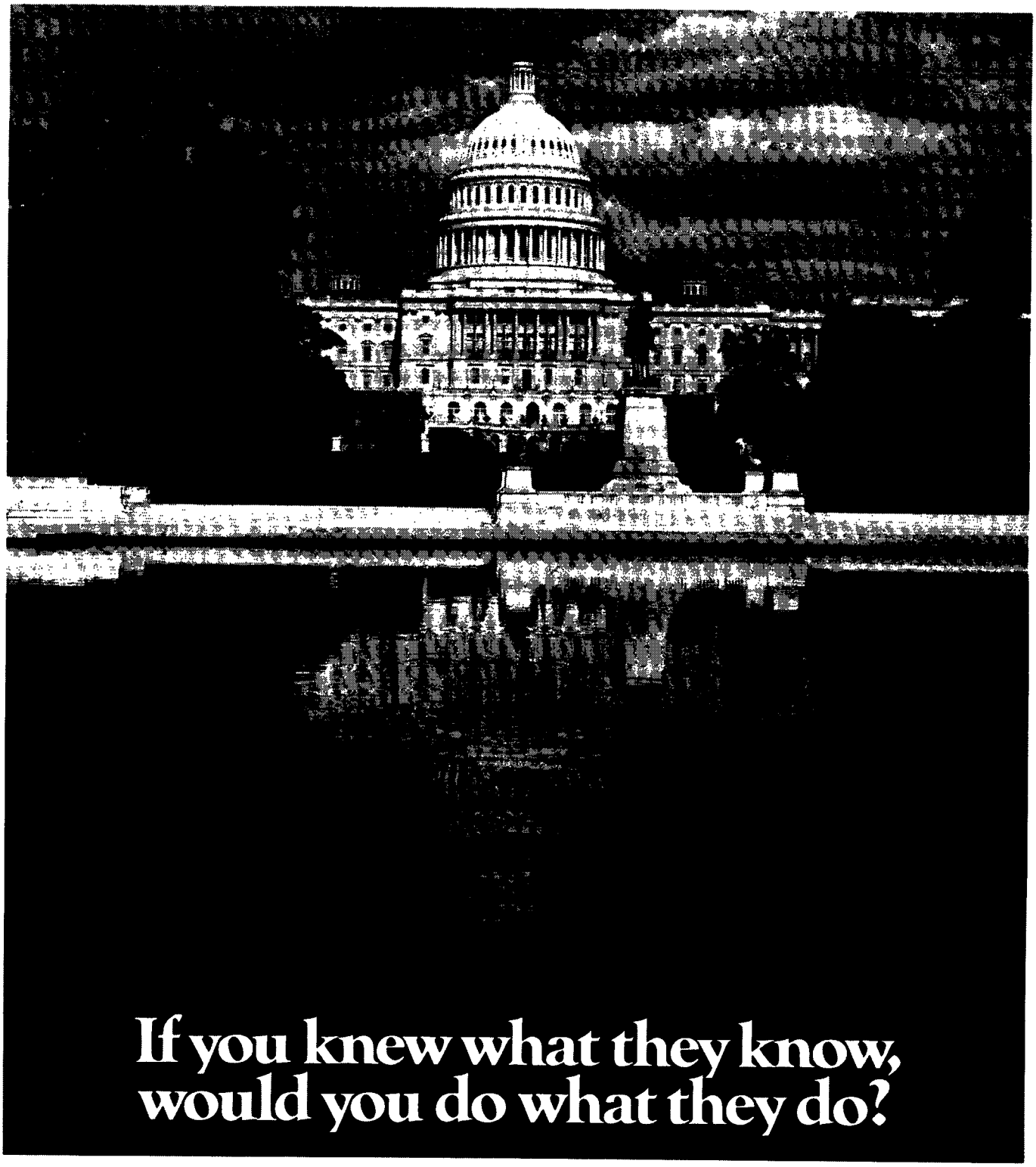

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Commentary
March 2000

Democracy for All?

James Q. Wilson

TODAY WE wonder whether the whole world might become democratic. Acting on the belief that it can, our government has bent its energies toward encouraging the birth or growth of democracy in places around the globe from Haiti to Russia, from Kosovo to the People's Republic of China. In doing so, it has enjoyed a kind of sanction from the century just past, which was indeed marked by the growth of regimes resting on popular consent and a commitment to human freedom.

That has hardly been the only salient characteristic of the age; the 20th century was also an era of mass murder, in which more than 170 million people were killed by their own governments. In some ways, in fact, it is easier to explain *that* phenomenon than to explain the increase in the number of democratic regimes. Living for most of their history in tiny villages, people have customarily viewed those in other villages as at best distant strangers and at worst mortal enemies. When agriculture and industry brought people together into large cities, the stage was set for dictatorial leaders, driven by power and ideology and aided by modern technology, to seize and maintain political control by destroying not only their personal rivals but entire populations who could be depicted as the enemies of the state. In the worst cases, this destruction has amounted to genocide.

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But if hostility and mass murder can, alas, be easily explained, democracy is an oddity. How do people who evolved in small, homogeneous villages become tolerant of those whom they do not know and who may differ from them in habits and religion? How can village government, based on tradition and consensus, be transformed into national government based on votes cast by strangers?

Democratic government cannot rest simply on written constitutions. Many Latin American nations have had constitutions similar to that of the United States but have practiced not democracy but oligarchy. Religion may help foster tolerance, if people take the Golden Rule seriously. But we know that some religious people are fanatics and some agnostics tolerant. We also know that in some faiths, such as Islam, there is no separation between religious and secular law, and that the absence of this distinction tempts religious leaders to impose authoritarian rule on their followers. Voltaire once said that a nation with one church will have oppression; with two, civil war; with a hundred, freedom. Religious freedom strengthens political freedom, but religious freedom exists only after political freedom has been secured.

In what follows I do not intend to dwell on the ideas that have inspired, shaped, and informed democratic government. Rather, I want to suggest some conditions that to my mind have underlain the emergence and survival of our oldest democracies. They come under four headings.

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The first is *isolation*. The freest nations have been protected from invasion by broad oceans or high mountains. England, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States enjoy ocean boundaries; Switzerland has a mountainous one. The significance of isolation is that it minimizes the need for a large standing army commanded by a single ruler, thus minimizing the need for high taxes to sustain the army and unfettered authority to empower the ruler. By contrast, in nations without secure boundaries—France, Austria, Hungary, Prussia—demands for popular rule and for a weak central government had to be subordinated to the need for a powerful army.

Imagine what life in the United States would have been like if Spain had remained in Florida and France had retained the Louisiana territory. To manage the inevitable skirmishes and wars, our national government would have grown more powerful more quickly and would have taxed and regulated more heavily.

THE SECOND condition is *property*. For many modern thinkers, private property is the enemy of human equality and therefore of democracy. Property is theft, wrote Proudhon. The *Communist Manifesto* promised the abolition of private property, and generations of social planners have sought to diminish its reach. But in fact private property is the friend of democracy. Aristotle understood that it stimulates work by providing rewards to the owner, reduces arguments by supplying a basis for allocating goods, and enhances pleasure by creating a physical object for human affection. In his *Politics* he first describes the private household and how it is managed before going on to argue that government exists to perfect the character of the householders.

But private property furthers democracy only if ownership is widespread. If one rich man has almost all the property and many poor men have none, a struggle will ensue between the landowner and the landless. A central question, therefore, is which historical forces produce the widespread ownership of property and which do not. To this question, Alan MacFarlane of Cambridge University has given powerful answers in *The Origins of English Individualism* (1978).

In much of medieval Europe outside England, land was owned by clans or extended families, which managed their land collectively. Farms produced goods chiefly for families rather than for markets, and, as children were required to run the farm, marriages were arranged at an early age for the convenience of the clan.

Since clan control of property meant that land rarely changed hands, hardly any law was created to govern such transactions. Since farm produce was seldom sold, little law was developed to govern exchanges. Since marriages were arranged, there was little law to govern conjugal matters. In short, little law was developed of the sort we now recognize. And, with little law, few courts were needed to interpret or apply it. Such tribunals as existed were not independent of other sources of authority; their rulings reflected the personal decision or will of the feudal prince.

In England and perhaps elsewhere in northwestern Europe, MacFarlane shows, matters were very different. From at least the 13th century on, individual ownership of land was common. Though parents exercised a great deal of authority over their households, and thus over their land, they did not do so as representatives of a clan that collectively controlled it. Land could be bought, sold, bequeathed, and inherited. Many people were poor, but most were not landless.

Individual ownership was so important in England that a man had to own land before starting a family. Since it might take a long time for this to happen, marriages occurred later in life than was the case in Eastern Europe. In England, too, the prospective husband and wife usually had to agree to the union, including one arranged by their parents. Many married over parental objections.

Because land in England could change hands easily, a body of rulings grew up to manage such transactions. This collection of individual decisions, later accepted and codified by others, became the common law of England. It was produced by courts that to a large degree were independent of the king, and it contained judgments independent of his authority. The legal claims granted by this law constituted a set of rights—not broad rights aimed at political power but rights of ownership, sale, and title. Once the language of rights entered public consciousness, however, it was only a matter of time before these selfsame rights, interpreted and applied by the independent courts, became claims against the king.*

* There was, of course, a landowning English aristocracy, but an aristocrat's status was not defined by any legal claim applying to him as an individual. According to the English rule of primogeniture, only the eldest son inherited the land and hence the title, while other sons had neither a claim on the land nor membership in the aristocracy. They might be wealthy because of gifts from their father, but they were not dukes because he was a duke. In France, by contrast, where there was no primogeniture, every son of a duke had a share in his father's land and a claim on an aristocratic title. The kings of France thus had to devote a great deal of time to managing their large, unwieldy, and rivalrous aristocracy.

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Just why England and a few other nations of northwestern Europe took this path of individual property rights and helped create a property-oriented legal system is not well understood. But having taken that path, they also laid the groundwork for democratic rule that was to come several centuries later—the same groundwork that was then exported to America, English Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

THE THIRD condition is *homogeneity*. During the cold war we could be excused for thinking that the great drivers of human life were ideology and economics. In fact, however, as Daniel P. Moynihan has observed, the deepest and most pervasive source of human conflict is ethnic rivalry. Russia has broken apart on ethnic lines; much of Africa and the Middle East is split along ethnic lines; Yugoslavia has sundered on ethnic lines. World War I was a struggle over "national"—that is, ethnic—self-determination, and World War II, though it might have been waged by Hitler under any circumstances, was justified by him in the name of the alleged superiority of "Aryans" and their presumed right to be politically reunited with their fellow "Aryans" in other nations.

Several democratic nations are today ethnically diverse, but at the time democracy was being established, that diversity was so limited that it could be safely ignored. England was an Anglo-Saxon nation; America, during its founding period, was overwhelmingly English; so also, by and large, were Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.

Then there is Switzerland—ethnically quite a diverse society that nonetheless managed to create a democracy out of an alliance among French, German, and Italian speakers who were divided almost equally between Protestants and Catholics. The Swiss model—a democratic nation in which much authority, especially that of the courts, was left in the hands of the cantons and only modest powers were bequeathed to the national president—is a fascinating one, but so far it has hardly served as a guide to other nations.

I am not suggesting that ethnic homogeneity is a good thing or ought to be preserved at any cost; nor am I denying that democracies can become ethnically heterogeneous. Certainly one of the great glories of the United States is to have become both vigorously democratic and ethnically diverse. But it is a rare accomplishment. Historically, and with few exceptions, the growth of democracy and of respect for human rights was made easier—often much easier—to accomplish in nations that had a more or less common culture.

Indeed, in the formative years of a nation, ethnic diversity can be as great a problem as foreign enemies. The time, power, and money that must be devoted to maintaining one ethnic group in power is at least equivalent to the resources needed to protect against a foreign enemy. When one part of a people thinks another part is unworthy of rights, it is hard for a government to act in the name of the "rights of the people." That is why democracy in England preceded democracy in the United Kingdom: because many parts of that kingdom—the Scots, the Irish—had very different views about who should rule them and how. They still do.

FINALLY, *tradition*. Democratic politics is rarely produced overnight. In 1914, Europe had only three democracies. By the end of World War I, that number had grown to thirteen; but by the time of the next war, the number had fallen again as Germany, Italy, and other nations became authoritarian. Between 1950 and 1990, there were roughly as many authoritarian regimes as democratic ones, and the rate at which democratic regimes changed into authoritarian ones was about the same as the rate at which authoritarian systems changed into democratic ones.

The oldest democracy, England, relied heavily on a tradition of human rights to move slowly toward modern democratic rule. Its problem—one that every nation must eventually face, and usually over a much briefer period—was how to get a government to respect the rights of people who did not necessarily support it. In this connection, the great event in English history was the signing of Magna Carta in 1215.

At the time, Magna Carta hardly resembled the American Bill of Rights. It was not a constitution or part of a constitution; much of it concerned taxes, debts, fines, licenses, and inheritances. Except for a few passages about not delaying or denying justice and not imprisoning people save by the judgment of their peers, it had little to do with human rights, let alone modern government.

But as the late Erwin Griswold of the Harvard Law School once put it, "Magna Carta is not primarily significant for what it was, but rather for what it came to be." Five centuries after it was written, it had become the touchstone for English liberties.

How so? Because it was constantly invoked whenever the king was at odds with his barons or his people. On at least 40 occasions over several centuries, the document was confirmed by the king, usually as a way of settling some current griev-

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ance; and every time the king restated his loyalty to it, Magna Carta gained authority. When the Puritan revolutionaries came to power, they did so in part in order to restore Magna Carta, a document most of them had probably never read.

As it passed into English folklore, so also was it exported to America. American colonists spoke of having "the rights of Englishmen," by which they meant the rights specified in Magna Carta and the subsequent decisions allegedly justified by it. Andrew Hamilton defended Peter Zenger's right to publish freely by reference to Magna Carta, even though the document says nothing about free speech. The constitutions of the United States and of several individual states put into writing the assumptions of Magna Carta: government has limited and defined powers, the judiciary should be independent, private property is important, and the "law of the land"—that is, British common law—should be the basis for settling disputes.

In America, the Declaration of Independence acquired a power similar to that of Magna Carta, but this time for reasons that could be more easily discerned in the text, with its "self-evident" truths that all men are entitled to life, liberty, and "the pursuit of happiness," and that these entitlements can be abridged only by due process of law. The Declaration and the Bill of Rights have become icons of American politics, to which people instantly give loyalty even though they may in practice disagree with one or more of their provisions.

For an illustration, finally, of the crucial importance of democratic tradition, we need only look to Japan. It is geographically isolated, its people own property, and it is ethnically homogeneous. But until 1945 it lacked any strong tradition of personal liberty and democratic rule. And so democracy came late to Japan, and at the point of a bayonet.

WILL, THEN, the whole world become democratic? Unless history offers no lessons at all, one must wonder. None of the conditions I have mentioned—isolation, private property, ethnic homogeneity, and deeply felt traditions of human rights—can be found in China or Russia or in much of Africa or the Middle East. Bits and pieces exist in parts of Latin America, more so lately than earlier, but that region's welcome flirtation with democratic rule is still relatively short-lived.

There are two ways democracy can spread despite the absence of the historical forces that have produced it elsewhere. One is through military conquest. In the 19th century, English rule provided the basis for democracy in India, just as in the 20th century the victorious Allies provided it for Germany and, as I have noted, Japan. In all three cases, nations having little experience with democracy had its lessons forcibly imposed, and so successfully that it has survived and shows every sign of entrenchment. But since democracies rarely conquer other nations, this mechanism will seldom be available.

The other way is economic globalization. Not every nation with free markets is democratic, but every democratic nation has something akin to a free market. Free markets both foster and require an openness to new ideas and scientific inquiry, opportunity for innovation, and a prudent level of regulation—qualities hard to come by in undemocratic regimes. The arrival of globalization and the Internet are making it clear to everybody in every nation just where one can buy the best goods at the lowest prices. In the face of widespread knowledge about what efficiency can achieve, nondemocratic governments will have to scramble to maintain inefficiency.

Of course, scramble they will. Singapore believes that it can be both prosperous and undemocratic, and so far it has managed. China has bet that it can do the same. But will these successes endure? No one can be certain. An optimistic friend of mine has predicted that, because it wishes to be rich, China will become democratic by the year 2013. Perhaps. My question is whether it will still be democratic in the year 2033.

In the long run, democracy and human freedom are good for everyone even though they may create some mischief in the near term. But the good they bring can only be appreciated when people are calm and tolerance is accepted. The late Edward C. Banfield, perhaps the best student of American politics in modern times, said something about political systems in general that applies with particular force to democracies:

> A political system is an accident. It is an accumulation of habits, customs, prejudices, and principles that have survived a long process of trial and error and of ceaseless response to changing circumstances. If the system works well on the whole, it is a lucky accident—the luckiest, indeed, that can befall a society, for all of the institutions of the society, and thus its entire character and that of the human types formed within it, depend ultimately on the government and the political order.

To this I would add that a workable democracy is the happiest accident of all. By nourishing ours, we may perhaps hope that others will acquire something equally worthy of nurturance.

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The New Enemies of Circumcision

Jon D. Levenson

AMONG THE practices that have characterized the Jewish people over the millennia, surely none has been observed more widely, or more faithfully, than circumcision. The Book of Genesis, dating the origin of this practice to the time of the first patriarch, interprets it as the sign of God's eternal and indefectible covenant not only with Abraham but with the special people that will be descended from him. In this theology, circumcision, itself a divine commandment (*mitzvah*), is emblematic of the Jews' fidelity to the God who formed them as a people and gave them the Torah.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that even in modern times, Jews across the denominational spectrum have continued to have the procedure performed on their sons on the eighth day of life, just as the Torah prescribes. What may be more surprising is the durability of circumcision among those Jews for whom traditional theology is *un*-acceptable. All sorts of other practices bearing the warrant of tradition—Sabbath, dietary laws, daily prayer—have fallen by the wayside, but circumcision, known in Hebrew as *brit milah* (sometimes simply *brit* or, in Ashkenazi pronunciation, *bris*), endures. Remarking on this, no lesser a critic of Jewish traditionalism than Baruch Spinoza could see in circumcision the key to Jewish survival. "So important" is it, wrote this excommunicated Jew in the 17th century, "that I could persuade myself that it alone would preserve the nation forever."

To be sure, in the United States at least, the practice of circumcision is hardly limited to Jews (or traditional Muslims): performed on male babies in hospitals as a routine medical procedure, it has become, rather, a widespread fact of life. And this is precisely what gives resonance to the recent rise of a serious backlash movement to put a stop to it. Today, attacks on circumcision are not only increasing but becoming increasingly harsh. A veritable alphabet soup of activist organizations has sprung up, including BUFF (Brothers United for Future Foreskins), UNCIRC (UNCircumcising Information and Resources Center), NOHARMM (the National Organization to Halt the Abuse and Routine Mutilation of Males), and NORM (the National Organization of Restoring Men) and its predecessor, RECAP (Recover a Penis). In many cases, these organizations are not content to limit their efforts to public persuasion but seek nothing less than to make the practice a criminal offense.

Nor is the heightened visibility of such organizations—they are the subject of a sympathetic article, "The Foreskin Saga," by John Sedgwick in the February *GQ*— the only sign of the times. In a bitterly ironic comment on Spinoza's dictum, the anti-circumcision movement today comprises not only

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non-Jews (among whom there is a long and on the whole dishonorable history of belittlement of *brit milah*) but also Jews—even some Jews bearing rabbinical ordination. Although actual criminalization of the procedure may seem a remote prospect, the growth of sentiment opposing it is thus a phenomenon worthy of attention. As for the existence of a Jewish wing in the anticircumcision movement, it reveals fault lines within contemporary Jewry that affect a good deal more than the fate of one *mitzvah*.

THE STORY of circumcision in cross-cultural perspective has now been comprehensively and readably surveyed by David L. Gollaher, a historian of medicine and an opponent of the practice.[1] Early on, Gollaher announces his own position: "While there are many understandable religious, cultural, and aesthetic reasons men or parents might choose circumcision, it lacks a persuasive medical basis." The bulk of the book that follows is devoted to telling how a surgical procedure once restricted to the ritual life of a despised minority came, in 19th-century America, to be widely advocated and increasingly performed for its health benefits—benefits that Gollaher now believes to be largely spurious.

The tale begins in 1870, when Lewis A. Sayre, then the nation's leading orthopedist, thought he had discovered that circumcision cured some mysterious and strangely resistant cases of paralysis of the legs and hips in boys. Soon Sayre published his remarkable findings, now claiming that removal of the foreskin remedied more ailments than paralysis alone: "Many of the cases of irritable children, with restless sleep, and bad digestion, which are often attributed to worms, is [*sic*] solely due to the irritation of the nervous system caused by an adherent or constricted prepuce."

The connection drawn by Sayre was less outlandish than it might seem, at least for those times. As Gollaher explains, "most educated doctors" in the latter third of the 19th century subscribed to a theory of "reflex neurosis," according to which "a minor agitation or blockage in one part of the body might manifest itself in a seemingly unrelated area." (For a counterpart today, think of the theory of acupuncture.) The key thing was to find the source of the irritation, and the foreskin, an apparently unnecessary appendage and one relatively easily removed at birth, became a prime suspect in men (just as, in women, Gollaher explains, "the best cure for female 'nervousness'—a catchall diagnosis for anything from insomnia to depression—was [thought to be] clitoridectomy").

Other practices and theories of the time helped in the spread of circumcision. One was the germ theory of disease, powerfully advanced by the discoveries of Koch and Pasteur. Another was the growing cult of personal hygiene. An uncircumcised penis is more difficult to keep clean as it releases smegma, "thick sebaceous secretions that collect beneath the foreskin" and that would come to be labeled "infectious." The rise of interest in circumcision thus coincided with a moment in American history when "scrubbing with soap became a routine for millions of citizens." As a sign of "social and cultural refinement," indeed, circumcision became a new norm among white, middle-class Gentiles, helping to separate them, in Gollaher's words, from "recent immigrants, African Americans, the poor, and others at the margins of respectable society."[2]

Circumcision also played a role in another concern of late-19th-century physicians and moralists: masturbation, a practice to which were attributed such diverse conditions as paralysis (again), tuberculosis, and convulsions. In some instances, circumcision was prescribed not only to diminish the pleasure but also to punish, by inflicting pain on the source of a boy's ill-gotten delights. Thus, John Harvey Kellogg of the famed Battle Creek Sanitarium recommended circumcision "without administering an anesthetic, as the pain attending the operation will have a salutary effect upon the mind, especially if connected with the idea of punishment." Some prominent Jewish physicians jumped on this particular bandwagon, claiming that "circumcision served to immunize Jewish boys and men against the bad habit of masturbation." It was one of those rare occasions in modern times when the new science and traditional morals seemed to coincide.

SURVEYING THE range of *current* opinion on the medical effects of circumcision, Gollaher pronounces the evidence "stunningly contradictory." So at odds is the literature concerning both "the immediate risks and complications of the surgery itself" and "the effect circumcision may have on a male's propensity to suffer a variety of disorders later on" that over the last 30 years the American Academy of Pediatrics has twice reversed its position on the matter. In 1971 it "officially concluded

[1] *Circumcision: A History of the World's Most Controversial Surgery*. Basic Books, 272 pp., $25.00.

[2] Ironically, the one group of recent immigrants who had practiced the procedure from time immemorial was still under attack for it. "By the 1880's," Gohaller writes, "as more and more Gentile physicians recommended and performed the operation as a neonatal routine, they [also] began to attack *brit milah* as primitive, unsanitary, and dangerous."

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that there were no medical grounds for routine infant circumcision," then recanted the decision in 1985, but reconfirmed it in 1999.

There is, however, a reason for the indecisiveness. Although many alleged medical benefits have now been debunked, some, as Gollaher reluctantly concedes, still command considerable empirical support.

Well-established, for instance, is the effectiveness of the procedure against cancer of the penis, phimosis (a narrowing of the opening of the foreskin), and balanitis (an inflammation usually associated with phimosis). In the case of sexually transmitted disease (STD, the new name for venereal disease), the evidence in favor of a prophylactic effect is again formidable, especially against syphilis and gonorrhea. According to a recent study from Seattle cited by Gollaher, "the odds of an uncircumcised man's being infected [with syphilis] were four times greater than for his circumcised counterpart"; for gonorrhea, the odds dropped to 1.6 times but were "certainly still significant." Ever on the lookout for qualifying factors in his favor, Gollaher pounces on "the fact that the Seattle study only included men who chose testing or treatment at a public-health clinic—a high-risk population."

When it comes to HIV, the best-known disease often associated with sexual activity, the case for circumcision would again seem strong. The prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine* reported in 1997 that "[m]ale circumcision consistently shows a protective effect against HIV infection," while a study in another journal found that "men with foreskins were 2.22 times more likely to be infected with HIV than those without." Again, Gollaher seeks to undermine the seemingly obvious conclusion by wondering "whether the circumcised practice different hygiene, engage in different sexual behaviors, or even eat different foods than the uncircumcised."

Similarly with urinary tract infection (UTI). A former Army pediatrician named Thomas Wiswell, who had once been of the opinion that routine circumcision was not medically indicated, changed his mind after examining the records of military hospitals: these demonstrated that "as the circumcision rate dropped, the number of UTI cases in boys skyrocketed." Other studies in this country and Australia report analogous findings. Although Gollaher has a hard time countering such dramatic results, he gives it the old college try, first by conjecturing that some of the infected boys really were circumcised after all and then by questioning whether the gains of circumcision were worth the cost of painful surgery, itself occasionally a source of infection.

Here we come to one heart of the anticircumcision argument. In the minds of activists like Gollaher, whatever the marginal benefits of the procedure, they are more than offset by the pain experienced by the infant boy. Whereas earlier medical literature often denied or minimized this pain, more recent studies—using, Gollaher tells us, such indications as "infants' heart rates, breathing, intensity and duration of crying, consolability, sociability . . . motor activity, flexion of fingers and toes, and sleep patterns"—conclude that it "is simply too severe to be relieved by a mild analgesic."

Of course, even if one were to concede the evidence of "severe" pain, one might still think it worth undergoing for the sake of prevention. In some instances—when a boy is at risk of renal infection because of urinary reflux, or a young man is at increased risk of AIDS because of a predisposition to engage in sodomy—it is not hard to imagine parents wishing they had put their son through the operation before tragedy struck. But no such ambiguities exist for David Gollaher, who, by the end of his book, having altogether dropped the stance of the dispassionate observer, has come to liken routine medical circumcision to female genital mutilation (FGM), thus equating a common and very safe procedure that reputable researchers have shown to have prophylactic effects against a variety of genital ailments with a rare procedure whose side effects include (in his own words) "hemorrhage and shock . . . clitoral cysts, labial adhesions, recurrent urinary tract infections, renal scarring and kidney dysfunction, and sterility, and, as intended, loss of sexual feeling."

Given his partisanship, it is perhaps no surprise that Gollaher utters not a word of criticism of any of the organizations, however outré, that have been formed to abolish circumcision or to reverse its effects surgically by means of foreskin restoration (a medically controversial procedure dating back to Greco-Roman times and described by Gollaher in some detail). By contrast, he has real difficulty acknowledging any positive case at all on the other side. When controlled, double-blind studies speak in favor of circumcision, he immediately suspects bias, while the most outlandish claims for the negative effects of circumcision pass without critical scrutiny or interrogation. One such claim, by a writer named Ronald Goldman, attributes to the procedure American men's putative "'avoidance of intimacy in male-female relationships' (which part-

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ly explains high divorce rates), disregard for women's sexuality, and, most alarming, a pandemic of violence manifest in America's high rates of assault, rape, and murder." What double-blind study generated *those* conclusions?

THIS BRINGS us back to Gollaher's profession of sympathy at the beginning of his book for the "many understandable" reasons that some people—meaning mostly Jews—"might choose circumcision." Here, too, his handling of the issues hardly inspires confidence; quite the contrary.

Gollaher prefaces his discussion of *brit milah* in Judaism with a review of circumcision in Egypt, speculating (as have many before him) that Moses was the conduit between the two cultures. About Egyptian circumcision itself he writes that it was intended to enhance "physical vitality" and "to cleanse the body's natural flow"—goals familiar enough from modern America but, as it happens, light years away from the predominating rationales of ancient Judaism. By thus attributing the origins of Jewish circumcision to primitive concerns about hygiene, Gollaher not only downplays classical Jewish theology but subtly enables himself to turn today's medical ambivalence about the practice against the Jewish *mitzvah* as well.

He also turns Moses himself against it. "Moses was not circumcised while he lived in Pharaoh's household," Gollaher writes confidently, and adds, citing a talmudic text, "Strangely enough, he would remain uncircumcised throughout his long life." It is true that the Bible never mentions Moses' circumcision (or that of almost any other figure), and some practitioners of Pentateuchal criticism do attribute the norm of circumcision to a late source. But long before the birth of the great lawgiver, as the biblical narrative has it, the norm had already come to Abraham, along with an insistence that the rite be performed on the eighth day. As for Gollaher's invocation of the Talmud, nowhere in rabbinic literature is it suggested that Moses was uncircumcised. (It was for neglecting to circumcise his *son* that Moses was punished in the text cited by Gollaher.)

More troubling than any of this is Gollaher's use of a 17th-century account by the English author Samuel Purchas of the alleged habit among Jews of kidnapping, circumcising, and crucifying a Christian boy every year around Easter. "Was there," he writes in mock innocence, "any basis for Purchas's tale?" And, almost incredibly, he continues:

> Certainly there are indications of bizarre practices, as in the [18th-century] *Anglia Judaica* account, "the famous Trial of Jacob of Norwich, and Accomplices for Stealing away, and Circumcising, a Christian child." In this case, court testimony confirms that a five-year-old boy was abducted while playing in the street, and spirited away to Jacob Norwich's [*sic*] house. There his captors blindfolded him and cut off his foreskin. Subsequently, they played a strange game, burying the severed foreskin in a basin filled with dry sand then "blowing the Sand with their Mouths, till they found it again." The winner of the contest declared the boy a Jew. Somehow the boy was returned home and his kidnappers were brought to trial, where his guardians told the court that "by some art or other" the circumcision had been reversed and the boy's foreskin restored.

If nothing else, this last detail, about the restoration of the boy's foreskin "by some art or other," ought to have raised a doubt—even in David Gollaher's mind—as to the ability of such "court testimony" to confirm anything other than the virulence of anti-Jewish prejudice in premodern Europe. To take this account as an "indication of bizarre practices" that might lend credibility to Purchas's version of the infamous medieval blood libel is historiographic impudence of the lowest order. Is the case against routine medical circumcision so weak that its proponents need to resurrect hoary anti-Semitic libels to make their point?

FOR THE Jews of ancient and medieval times, in any event, differing opinions as to the prophylactic effects of circumcision would have elicited little or no interest. They practiced circumcision not out of hygienic concerns but out of obedience to the *mitzvot* of the Torah. And the same can be said of most traditionalist Jews today, who observe *brit milah* for the same reason that they observe the Sabbath, the dietary laws, and the laws of daily prayer or marital purity. What is more, as I noted at the outset, to their numbers could be added, at least until now, the mass of Jews who have continued to practice this rite long after their taste for other points of traditional law has diminished or disappeared.

This is not to say that circumcision has always gone unquestioned among modern Jews. In mid-19th-century Germany, for instance, the Society for the Friends of Reform pronounced the ancient rite obsolete, only to retreat before a firestorm of opposition that included many of their fellow Reformers. In the United States, the issue came up in 1885 at a rabbinical conference in Pittsburgh at

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which were set forth the principles of Reform Judaism.

Whereas some German Reformers had spoken out against circumcision in general, the controversy at Pittsburgh was limited to the case of adult proselytes: Kaufmann Kohler, a leading figure in the movement, pronounced the requirement of circumcision in this case "a barbarous cruelty which disfigures and disgraces our ancestral heirlooms and our holy mission as priests among mankind . . . a national remnant of savage African life." But once again the anticircumcision party was doomed. For just as the rabbis gathered at Pittsburgh were declaring as a general principle that "[w]e reject all [ceremonies] as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization," modern civilization, at least in its American guise, was discovering (or imagining) the enormous hygienic benefits of circumcision. And so, in an ironic reversal of the accustomed pattern in these matters, the Jewish impulse toward acculturation weighed in favor of retaining, rather than rejecting, an ancient ritual.[3]

But now that both scientific opinion and the cultural mood are shifting to some degree, we see the surfacing of an increasingly vocal opposition to circumcision that is itself explicitly Jewish. Thus, the same Ronald Goldman from whom I quoted earlier has recently brought out a work entitled *Questioning Circumcision: A Jewish Perspective*.[4] Where David Gollaher sees the practice as backward and medically unnecessary, Goldman, a psychologist, sees it as much worse: a positively demonic force that has caused all manner of devastation to the Jewish people collectively as well as to the unfortunate individuals on whom it has been performed, and whose abolition is essential to the recovery of their psychic health.

Brit milah, according to Goldman, "is an enormous obstacle to the development of basic trust between mother and child." Since the mother has permitted her baby son to be, in effect, mutilated, the son naturally hates her—and, through her, all other Jewish women as well. Hence "the high rate of intermarriage" in today's Jewish community, which is itself but a reflection of the "widespread anger in Jewish men toward Jewish women." Not only that, but when young Jewish men do marry, they are more likely to engage in "spousal abuse . . . a serious problem across the United States and Israel."

IF GOLDMAN'S arguments tend to refute themselves by their absurdity—he does not scruple to explain why is it only in the last generation or two that a millennia-old practice has suddenly led to intermarriage, or offer evidence that uncircumcised Jewish men are less likely to intermarry or to engage in spousal abuse—a much more serious and respectable assault appears in *Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism*.[5] This is a survey of the whole history of circumcision in Judaism by Lawrence A. Hoffman, a distinguished scholar of liturgy at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the Reform seminary in New York.

Unlike Goldman, Hoffman is a religious insider as well as a generally thoughtful scholar. But for him, too, the *mitzvah* of *brit milah* is all but irredeemably tainted, and for not dissimilar reasons. As one whose entire view of Jewish tradition is informed by what he is proud to call his "commitment to feminism," Hoffman is appalled by the "blatant sexist implications" of this ritual. But his case against it is grounded in what appears at least to be a scrupulous reading of classical Jewish texts, and so demands a closer look.

In the earliest biblical traditions, before circumcision was interpreted as a sign of the Abrahamic covenant, it functioned, Hoffman tells us, as a fertility rite. (His principal evidence here is a law in Leviticus that employs the Hebrew word for "foreskin" to characterize the first three annual crops of a fruit tree, which must not be eaten. "Analogous to pruning fruit trees," he writes, "circumcision provides a prophylactic against barrenness.") Only later, in the stratum of Pentateuchal tradition that critical scholars call P—for "Priestly"—does circumcision become "no mere arbitrary sign but an iconic representation of that for which it stands": namely, membership in the highly fertile nation to come forth from Abraham's loins. In the process, however, Jewish tradition took a huge step in the direction of the misogyny and sexism that have historically characterized it: "A covenant made with Abraham, but not with Sarah, is sealed with a sign that is itself an iconic reminder that being male, not female, is what matters." And that made the covenant doubly divisive, demarcating male from female even as it demarcated Jew from non-Jew.

Bad as this was, the talmudic rabbis only worsened it. For them, the key thing about circumcision was the salvific effect of the blood shed in the pro-

[3] To be sure, the rationale no longer lay in the Torah but in something more changeable, namely, scientific opinion. That may be why not all leaders of American Reform were impressed with it. "A sanitary prophylaxis against what?" asked Emil Hirsch at Pittsburgh. "And why not take vaccination also under our religious sanction?"

[4] Vanguard, 133 pp., $11.95.

[5] University of Chicago Press, 256 pp., $42.50.

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cedure. But this was specifically male blood, in contradistinction to the female blood of menstruation, which the rabbis saw as a ritual *contaminant*. Hence another "blatantly sexist" implication: male blood saves, female blood pollutes.

What to say about all this? There is, to begin with, no reason to believe that the law of the fruit tree in Leviticus is connected with fertility or, for that matter, with pruning, and similarly unwarranted is the inference that circumcision was intended to promote fertility. (The use of the term "foreskin" to denote the first three crops most likely relates to the young, new character of the fruit.) If we must have an "iconic" interpretation, then the rite is better seen as an icon of endogamy, which is how it functions in the story of Shechem and Dinah in Genesis 34.

As for Hoffman's notion that the Priestly source downgrades the status of women and likens them to foreigners, this illustrates only his readiness to adopt feminist readings on the flimsiest evidence. In the pre-Priestly sources that critical scholars isolate, the promise to Abraham (there called "Abram") and the covenant with him designate no specific woman as the mother of the great nation that he is to father. It is only with the Priestly reformulation that Sarai, now renamed "Sarah" (apparently meaning "princess"), is designated as the matriarch—despite the laws of nature, since she has been barren all her life and is now eighty-nine years old. Hoffman, in other words, has his chronology, and hence his logic, exactly backward.

Nor does the Priestly source declare "an outright war on the matrilineal system," as Hoffman imagines. Whether there really was such a system is open to doubt. But in any case it is in the Priestly and no earlier source that the chosen people are said to come from *both* Abraham and Sarah, and not from Abraham alone. Hoffman also misses the fact that the covenant is with the nation collectively and not with Israelites as individuals, and that circumcision symbolizes but does not effectuate this covenant. To say, as he does in a nearby passage, that women are party to the covenant "only in a secondary way" is like saying that American citizenship applies only to those who fly the stars and stripes on their flagpoles, everyone else being a second-class citizen.

Finally, the idea that the saving power of the blood of circumcision is biased against women, whose menstrual blood is a ritual pollutant, is itself biased and surprisingly ignorant. The rabbinic concept probably has its origin in biblical sacrifice, where, as here, a knife is deliberately wielded in fulfillment of a religious intention. In the case of menstruation, no knife is used, and blood is not drawn but expelled involuntarily. To apply the sacrificial concepts to menstruation would have been singularly inapposite (even if the Bible had not already defined the latter as a ritual contaminant). If there were an equivalent surgical procedure for women and the rabbis failed to deem the blood salvific, Hoffman might have a case. As it is, he is simply playing fast and loose with the data.

DO ANY of these arguments matter? They do if the anticircumcision campaign, in both its general and its Jewish guises, continues to gain momentum, and Jews find themselves casting about for reasons to maintain their allegiance to the practice. Even thoroughgoing traditionalists may find their lives more difficult as the anticircumcision movement makes headway in the general culture. In the worst case, should the activists' claim that circumcision violates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights carry the day, the practice could become illegal, and Jews (and Muslims) who persisted in their traditionalism, as many would surely do, might find themselves the targets of state action. Minimally, one could predict some hard-fought battles over the implications of the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of religion.

Because American Jews live in one of the few countries in which hygienic circumcision is widely practiced, they easily forget the role that contempt for the practice has played in the history of anti-Semitism. David Gollaher predicts that routine circumcision for medical reasons will soon "go the way of routine bloodletting"; if it does, *brit milah* will recover its function as a demarcation of Jews from Gentiles—the sign of the covenant of Abraham. Some might reasonably regard this as a good thing; but history has also shown that the sharper the demarcation between groups, the more vulnerable is the smaller and weaker group. The whiff of anti-Semitism (and/or Jewish self-hate) that one occasionally picks up in the literature of the anticircumcision movement may be a harbinger of much stronger odors to come.

And then there are the less traditionalist or nontraditionalist or antitraditionalist Jews, for many of whom obedience to the commandments is subordinate to individual choice and subjective experience. What recourse will *they* have? An article that appeared a few years ago in the *Northern California Jewish Bulletin*, quoting the co-chairman of the *brit milah* board of Reform Judaism, suggests the scope of the problem:

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> There are people who find [*brit milah*] a profoundly meaningful way of connecting with the Jewish people and there are those who don't. . . . People have to fulfill their inner sense.

The only thing this sentiment, so quintessentially of the moment, neglects to acknowledge is that people's "inner sense" is itself inextricably connected with the culture in which they find themselves. Should that larger culture come to judge *brit milah* to be not only medically unnecessary but also brutalizing and mutilating, the number of Jews who find the practice "profoundly meaningful" will assuredly diminish, and the abhorrence of it expressed by some early Reform leaders will return with a vengeance.

Nor is there any assurance that liberal Jews inclined to follow their "inner sense" and violate the *mitzvah* will be persuaded otherwise by their rabbis. Lawrence Hoffman tells of a study group that he held with fifteen rabbis, male and female:

> As we went around the room, several of these young rabbis related the case of their own son's circumcision, about which, it turns out, they frequently harbored intense rage—rage at themselves for allowing it to happen, and in some cases rage at the *mohel* [ritual circumciser] who had done it and botched the job.

This experience, Hoffman adds, was not anomalous. In an article not long afterward in the journal of his profession, a Reform rabbi asked:

> What about my son's needs? As he struggled in pain, had I somehow abandoned him for the sake of the ceremony? What kept me from aborting the ceremony on his behalf?

That questions like these are being asked (and implicitly regarded as unanswerable) by ordained religious leaders indicates the depth of the spiritual and moral void in which nontraditionalist Jews are being invited to find their bearings. Whatever private doubts they may have of their own, moreover, are unlikely to be stilled by half-measures like the one proposed by Lawrence Hoffman, who follows his highly negative analysis of the practice with an illogical vote to retain it anyway, while fiddling with the ceremony so that the operation "takes a backseat to the liturgy, thereby emphasizing the theological notion of covenant and playing down the actual procedure." As anybody knows who has ever attended a *brit milah*, the liturgy and the ensuing celebratory meal are already far more prominent and lengthier than the actual operation, which is over in minutes and viewed by very few of those present. But all the liturgy in the world will not disguise the fact that the child is a boy, not a girl (or a genderless humanoid), and that what is taking place is an operation and not simply a verbal affirmation of some abstract, disembodied theology.

Another haven for Jews fleeing a newly stigmatized practice might be something along the lines of Ronald Goldman's much bolder proposal to replace both the operation *and* its liturgy with a ceremony that he calls the "Bris Shalom." This is actually an anticircumcision ritual in disguise, in which biblical verses are cleverly misinterpreted to speak against the very practice for which the "Bris Shalom" is a substitute. But Goldman's ceremony does have one virtue: it poses very starkly the underlying clash of values that separates the anticircumcision ethos (as it might be called) from classical Judaism, and it thereby helps inadvertently to expose the ground on which any forthright defense of the practice must stand.

In Goldman's transvalued ritual, one line in particular, to be pronounced by the parents, stands out: "This child, created in Your image, is whole, complete, and perfect."

That man is created in the image of God is, indeed, a powerful biblical idea, affirmed more than once in the Book of Genesis. It is also a sentiment that could conceivably be invoked against the notion that all men should be circumcised. But the Jewish ceremony that the "Bris Shalom" opposes takes as its model not Adam but Abraham—not, that is, the father of universal humanity but the father of the Jewish people. And when Abraham is enjoined in Genesis (as Adam never is) to be "whole," "complete," or "perfect," that injunction is, in fact, closely connected to circumcision. To put it in a nutshell: a man can be a whole person without being circumcised, but he is not yet a whole Jew. Or: Adam intact is Abraham in need of perfection.

Precisely this distinction between Adamic and Abrahamic humanity is crucial to Jewish thought. "A philosopher," an ancient midrash reports,

> asked Rabbi Hoshaya, "If circumcision is so precious, why was it not given to Adam?" Replied the sage: "Whatever was created in the first six days of creation requires that something more be done to it: mustard needs sweetening, lupine needs sweetening, wheat needs grinding, and man, too, needs to be perfected."

The rabbi's response is consonant with the broad currents of rabbinic theology. To the Bible and the ancient rabbis alike, *brit milah* is not a personal op-

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tion for Jewish boys. It is a *mitzvah*, a religious act commanded by God as part of His gracious offer to bring the Jewish people close to Him in holiness. To say that a Jewish child will decide whether to fulfill the *mitzvah* himself upon reaching adulthood—"The only persons who may consent to medically unnecessary procedures upon themselves are the individuals who have reached the age of consent," goes the Declaration of the First International Symposium on Circumcision—is like saying that he will at the same point decide what his mother tongue will be.

THE TENETS of rabbinic theology are directed in the first instance, of course, to Jews. But they also have something to say to the culture at large, and not only concerning circumcision. For this is a theology that in general sees human beings as born with a powerful appetite for evil, one that must be restrained, retrained, and redirected by a challenging and unending process of subordination to God's covenantal will. It is therefore, by definition, diametrically opposed to the Romantic affirmation of natural man and his raw instincts, and to that liberal psychology in which personal choice is sacrosanct, "experience" is the goal, and the traditional virtues of sacrifice, discipline, and obedience are slighted or neglected.

In this key regard, classical Judaism takes its place unmistakably on one side of the struggle over the long-term effects of contemporary liberal culture. Where that culture speaks in terms of human rights and the supremacy of personal choice, the ancient sources of Judaism speak powerfully of human duties (and of more duties for Jews than for Gentiles). Where it tends to endorse the voluntary character of identity, classical Judaism speaks of an inherited membership in a people from whom the individual is not free to resign. Where many today celebrate being whole ("intact"), classical Judaism pursues holiness, and always prefers the moral to the aesthetic. Where liberalism has embraced the interchangeability of sexual roles, Jewish sources see men and women as different by nature and by the plan of nature's divine Author. Where much of contemporary American culture now places the highest valuation on pleasure, especially sexual pleasure, and on the avoidance of any sort of pain, the classical Jewish texts value the willingness to suffer for a worthy cause, speak of the sanctity of marriage, and elevate self-control over self-expression.

In light of these radical disparities, it begins to seem no accident that circumcision, the very sign of the covenant between the Jews and their God, should have become the latest front in the battle over the Jewish future in America, or that the values at stake in this battle should turn out to include not only those of contemporary Judaism but, mutatis mutandis, those of contemporary America as well, a society undergoing a painful sorting-through of its own moral and cultural dispositions. For the sake of all parties concerned, and quite aside from the fate of specific medical procedures, one can only hope that victory in this struggle goes to the values that once were much more common in America than they have become, and that firmly underlie the theory and practice of *brit milah*.

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Yeltsin—and After

Richard Pipes

YOGI BERRA is said to have once proffered this advice: "If you come to a crossroads, take it." Russia seems to be following his counsel. It is simultaneously moving forward, toward democracy and the free market, and backward, toward authoritarian rule and imperialism. The man who has presided over this perplexing behavior is Boris Yeltsin.

Yeltsin has three major accomplishments to his credit: during the critical post-Gorbachev years, he prevented Russia from sliding back into Communism; he dissolved the Russian empire; and, for the first time in Russian history, he rose to be head of state by popular vote. How durable these accomplishments will prove to be is, however, far from clear. For no sooner were they put in place than their author began to backpedal.

Yeltsin's legacy, and his place in history, thus remain very much in doubt. In the meantime, we are indebted to a new and illuminating biography by the Russian émigré scholar Leon Aron* for insight into where this fascinating creature came from, and who he became.

NOTHING IN Yeltsin's youth or early career—he was born in the Ural Mountains in 1931—pointed to a remarkable future. He started out as a construction engineer, dutiful and hard-working, and joined the Communist party in 1961 at the age of thirty. The move indicated not so much political ambition as a desire to get ahead in his profession. But the party hierarchy had its eye on him. In 1976, he was appointed first secretary of its regional committee in the city of Sverdlovsk (now once again, as before the Revolution, Ekaterinburg), an important industrial center. There, in 1977, on orders from Yuri Andropov, the head of the KGB, he demolished the so-called Ipatev House where, 59 years earlier, Communist thugs had murdered the Russian imperial family. In 1981, he rose to full membership in the party's central committee.

Yeltsin soon attracted the attention of the reform-minded Mikhail Gorbachev. Within months of becoming the party's general secretary in 1985, Gorbachev brought him to Moscow to take charge of the country's largest and most important local party committee. The authorities had every reason to expect he would play by the rules. Just to make sure, they rewarded him with the customary emoluments of a top-level member of the *nomenklatura*, including, in Aron's words, "an enormous official dacha . . . serviced by three cooks, three waitresses, a maid, and a gardener," plus access to exclusive food stores, hospitals, and resorts and the use of a jumbo jet.

That Yeltsin was no ordinary careerist, however, should have become clear to the authorities when he

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refused to move into his luxurious country house, preferring to stay in a two-bedroom apartment in an unfashionable part of Moscow that he and his wife shared with their daughter. Such behavior spelled trouble because the entire Communist system was held together by elite privileges and entitlements that had given rise to social inequalities inconceivable in "bourgeois" countries. Yeltsin, of course, knew how the regime worked, but he apparently had no idea how wide the gulf was in Moscow, where 40,000 members of the *nomenklatura* enjoyed a living standard comparable to that of Western elites while the capital's ten million ordinary citizens had to struggle for the most basic necessities. Impulsively, he probed the system, taking his place incognito in store queues and riding the subway. The experience left him enraged.

As word got around that, unlike his predecessors, the capital city's new boss cared for ordinary people, Yeltsin became something of a popular hero. Emboldened, he began to challenge the very fundamentals of the Leninist-Stalinist system, asserting in speeches that party officials owed responsibility not to the party but to the people, and insisting that all Soviet citizens be treated equally: "We cannot allow again [a situation in which] some live under the law and others above it." With the instinct of a born politician, he sensed a groundswell of support for his views, and decried with increasing daring the inequalities pervading Soviet society.

UNDER NORMAL circumstances, such defiance would promptly have led to dismissal and disgrace. But these were not normal times: the situation in the country was quite desperate, and growing more so with every passing day. Although many Russians today look back with nostalgia to life under Communism, Aron reminds us just how misplaced such feelings are. In the late 1980's, when the system was still intact, 43 million Soviet citizens lived below the official poverty level, set at 75 rubles or $7.50 per person a month. Another 100 million barely survived on 100 rubles or $10 a month. Together the two groups made up 47 percent of the Soviet population. One-sixth of Soviet hospitals had no running water; 30 percent lacked indoor toilets. And so it went. The Communist system was grinding to a halt, incapable not only of keeping up with the rest of the industrialized world but of providing its people with minimal goods and services.

In the face of this reality, Gorbachev and his advisers, determined to implement a (limited) program of reform, were struggling to overcome the resistance of entrenched party interests. But Yeltsin moved audaciously to take charge of the mounting popular disaffection. In late 1987, criticizing the slow pace of change and complaining that he had no party support for his efforts to improve conditions in Moscow, he asked to be relieved of all his posts, including candidate (nonvoting) membership in the Politburo. It was a move without precedent in the entire history of the Soviet Union. The Communist party was not a political party in the ordinary sense, to be joined or left at one's pleasure, but a militant order, permanently at war with the rest of the world, whose officials could no more ask to be released from their posts than army officers could resign their commissions in the midst of battle. For violating this hallowed principle, Yeltsin came under furious attack as a renegade by, among others, two future heroes of the anti-Communist movement, Eduard Shevardnadze and Alexander Yakovlev.

What saved Yeltsin was Gorbachev's realization that reform was impossible within the existing political framework: to overcome the resistance of the *nomenklatura*, it would be necessary to carry out a certain degree of democratization, enlisting the populace in a struggle against the elite. This was an immensely risky step, but one undertaken in the apparent conviction that both the reform program and the Communist ideal enjoyed broad popular support.

Gorbachev's revolution from above was institutionalized in early 1989 by the formation of a "Congress of People's Deputies"—a hastily conceived representative body outside the Communist-party structure. A certain proportion of the delegates to this assembly was to be chosen in free elections, and Yeltsin seized the opportunity to present himself as a candidate from Moscow on an openly anti-Communist platform. The only objective of socialism that had been realized, he asserted, was the socialization (i.e., the expropriation) of property: hence, there could be no *perestroika*, or renewal, since there was nothing to "renew."

As Aron relates, his assault on the regime made him a national hero: he was swamped with mail from all parts of the country, and wherever he went he attracted immense crowds. In the event, he won a seat in the 1989 Congress with a stunning 92 percent of the Moscow vote.

IN THE fall of the same year, Yeltsin, well on his way to becoming the most popular politician in the USSR, visited the United States in the hope of seeing the country for himself and gaining support for his democratic agenda. He was overwhelmed by what he saw; as he himself would later relate, the journey was an "endless row of collapsed

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stereotypes and clichés." An unplanned visit to a supermarket near Houston made him realize what his own country was missing: Yeltsin, Aron writes, quoting an eyewitness, "was in 'shock.' 'For a long time,' on the plane to Miami, he sat motionless, his head in his hands. 'What have they done to our poor people!' he said after a long silence." In the opinion of a close adviser, "the last vestige of Bolshevism collapsed" in Yeltsin during this trip.

Yet, for all his open admiration of America, Yeltsin's request to see President George Bush was turned down. It is sobering to learn from Aron's biography how remarkably insensitive the Bush administration was to the Yeltsin phenomenon. So fixated was the White House on maintaining "stability" in the Soviet Union—as, two years later, it would be concerned with maintaining "stability" in Saddam Hussein's Iraq—that it avoided doing anything that might offend Gorbachev or undermine his authority. It preferred moderate Communism to democracy.

Rebuffed in his request to meet Bush, Yeltsin was instead passed on to Brent Scowcroft, the national security adviser. On his way to the meeting he was repeatedly humiliated, being ushered through a basement entrance to the White House and asked to wear a visitor's tag. A "two-bit headline-grabber" was Scowcroft's impression of his visitor, while President Bush, who by prearrangement had dropped in for a few minutes of inconsequential banter, observed that Yeltsin was no "Mr. Smooth" like Gorbachev.

Tragically, and as if to lend inadvertent credibility to such assessments, Yeltsin, the greatest popular tribune Russia had known since Alexander Kerensky (the moderate revolutionary overthrown by the Bolsheviks in November 1917), was about to reveal a trait that would prove most unfortunate both for him and his country: a tendency to fall into depression at the very moment of triumph. The cause of this behavior lay deep in his psychology—temperamentally, he was a man who flourished in crises. This trait, which would surface time and again, and in the end cause him untold harm, became apparent at the end of the 80's when, rather than press his victory, he withdrew and let others organize the liberal forces in the congress.

Before long, however, he emerged from his lethargy to champion a fresh cause: the breakup of the Soviet Union. The various so-called Soviet republics—nominally sovereign, but in fact colonies of Moscow—were beginning to stir as Gorbachev's policies of *glasnost* and political liberalization provided the first legal outlets for their frustrated nationalism. The three Baltic republics, acquired by the USSR in 1940 in a deal with Hitler, were the first to demand genuine sovereignty; others followed.

To curb these strivings, Gorbachev resorted to a combination of concessions and coercion. Yeltsin, by contrast, came out in support of the republics, and in a most unconventional manner: he not only affirmed every Soviet republic's right to secede, as guaranteed by the constitution, but called on *Russians* to exercise the same right. The tactic proved popular. In June 1990, at Yeltsin's behest, the Congress of People's Deputies declared Russia a sovereign republic, democratic and law-abiding, with strict separation of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

In this manner, Yeltsin and his allies, in Aron's words, "snatched the powerful idea of Russian national 'renewal' from party conservatives and 'national-patriots' and pressed it into the service of democratic modernization." The secession of Russia from the union enabled Yeltsin to circumvent not only Gorbachev but the whole Communist apparatus, and to carry his case directly to the people of the largest and most populous of the Soviet republics. In the summer of 1990, he resigned from the party. One year later, he ran for the presidency of Russia and won with 57 percent of the vote. He now had his own power base.

THE SAME events that propelled Yeltsin to the presidency of Russia had the effect of pushing Gorbachev to the right. Having distanced himself from the reformers, and having quietly abandoned his ambitious "500-day" economic-reform program, Gorbachev now became a captive of the conservative party establishment. That establishment was especially alarmed by Yeltsin's moves to dissolve the empire. In August 1991, a group of party functionaries and generals staged an abortive putsch.

Yeltsin responded to this act of sedition with the same courage and energy he revealed in the face of other crises. Backed by thousands of Muscovites, he neutralized the troops whom the putschists had sent to the so-called White House and liquidated the mutiny, emerging as the savior of Russia's fledgling democracy; indeed, the putsch would prove to mark the last gasp of the Communist regime. But then, at this culminating point of his political career, he once again faltered.

In November 1917, having seized power, Lenin had moved with remarkable speed to liquidate all opposition and eradicate every trace both of the czarist government and its democratic successor. Three-quarters of a century later, Boris Yeltsin proved far less deliberate. He did outlaw the Com-

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munist party, which had stood behind the putsch, but he soon relented, allowing a reconstructed party to participate in elections. He refrained from bringing the August putschists to trial. He left undisturbed the myriad symbols of Communism scattered across the country, including statues of Lenin and place-names commemorating him and his regime. He even failed to remove Lenin's mummy from its mausoleum in Red Square, which at that moment he could have done with impunity.

Aron interprets this inaction as proof of Yeltsin's tolerance and conciliatory spirit. In some measure it probably was: he may well have desired to avert a disastrous split in the nation between Communists and anti-Communists. But it was also, and above all, a symptom of weakness and indecision. Post-World War II Germany had outlawed the Nazi party and prosecuted wartime criminals, and yet remained democratic. Tolerance of mutiny is not a sign of democracy; to the contrary, it can prove fatal to democracy.

Yeltsin's revolution—for such it was—stopped halfway, leaving in place its, and his, most determined foes. Barely two years later, in October 1993, he had to resort to military force to crush another antidemocratic rebellion, this time centered on the Supreme Soviet. And once again, victory having been gained, he retreated, allowing the mutineers to run in parliamentary elections with free access to public radio and television.

HE DID take two decisive steps after August 1991. One was to meet with the heads of Belorussia and Ukraine and sign an accord dissolving the Soviet Union. This act not only unraveled the Soviet empire created by Lenin and Stalin but deprived Russia of the imperial conquests of the czars going back to the 17th century. The traditional link between the nation-state and the empire was broken.

The other post-August 1991 measure was to carry out a sweeping reform of Russia's economy. The immediate objective of this program, directed by Yegor Gaidar, was to unleash the nation's productive forces and prevent an economic catastrophe. But there was also a political goal: to neutralize the Communist elite by allowing it to appropriate a good part of the nation's wealth and, at the same time, to undercut the economic basis of Communism. In pursuit of this goal, Gaidar abolished fixed prices and wages in favor of prices determined by supply and demand, and privatized many state enterprises.

The reforms succeeded in their objective of shifting ownership of resources from state to society: by 1996, 70 percent of Russia's gross domestic product would come from the private sector. The effect was to depoliticize the bulk of the nation's trade and industry. But the reforms also had a negative effect, in the form of hyperinflation. This wiped out savings at the very moment when the dismantling of the Soviet state had deprived citizens of basic social services. A large proportion of Russians thus found themselves drifting in a world of private enterprise that they neither understood nor were equipped to cope with. Yeltsin's popularity dropped precipitously.

Faced with problems for which he was intellectually and temperamentally unprepared, and losing contact with his constituency, Yeltsin grew despondent. "After clearing the ground of huge stumps and boulders," Aron writes, "he seemed not to know how to till and husband." And he adds: "In 1994, the Kremlin press secretary often found the president at a bare desk in 'deep and sad pensiveness.'" It was in this mood that he ventured on what Aron describes as "the most serious political error of his life": the assault on Chechnya.

Ostensibly carried out to defend the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, of which Chechnya was a part, this operation was in fact driven by the perception that "reform and democracy no longer united and inspired." The stunning electoral triumph of the nationalist demagogue, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, in the 1993 balloting for the Duma persuaded Yeltsin that Russians had become more responsive to nationalist appeals. The military campaign was a replay of events 90 years earlier, when the czarist government, under mounting assault from peasants and liberal intellectuals, decided that it needed, in words attributed to the then-minister of war, A.N. Kuropatkin, "a short victorious war" to unite the country—and so provoked a fight with Japan.

As had happened in 1904-5, Yeltsin's offensive against rebellious Chechnya turned out to be neither short nor victorious. The demoralized Russian army, battling a fanatical Muslim enemy thoroughly familiar with its terrain, suffered defeat after defeat, each of them brought to the public's attention by Russia's now uncensored press. In the end, facing mounting public clamor, the government had to concede de-facto sovereignty to the Chechens.

Coming on top of inflation, this was a humiliating blow. Yeltsin's popularity continued to sag: by January 1996, his support plunged to 10 percent. Nevertheless, he managed to win the presidential election the following summer by cleverly presenting the contest between himself and the leader of the Communist party, Gennady Zyuganov, as a choice between advance toward a promising future and retreat to the unpalatable past. To this end, he ruthlessly exploited the media at the government's disposal.

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This victory was the last gasp of the old Yeltsin; from then on, it was all downhill. As his health deteriorated, he found himself less and less able to direct state affairs, management of which passed to what came to be known as "the Family," consisting of his daughter, Tatiana, the oligarch, Boris Berezovsky, and a handful of trusted insiders. The man who but a few years earlier had denounced privilege now became fond of power and the entitlements it brought. Immured in the Kremlin, he lost contact with the citizenry to whom he once had been so close. He cut a pathetic figure.

To some extent, it is true, Yeltsin's decline was due to the fickleness of the Russian electorate, which displays no political allegiances and expects its leaders to accomplish what it is unable to do for itself. In the fall of 1917 the same fate had befallen Kerensky—the country's idol only six months earlier. But much of the blame must rest on the erratic behavior of a man who had lost his bearings.

LEON ARON has written an outstanding political biography. In some respects, indeed, his book provides the best available account of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fitful attempts to build a modern state on its ruins. His research is prodigious, involving, in addition to a wide range of published sources, interviews with people who have worked with Yeltsin at various stages of his career. The book is written vividly and with considerable literary skill.

It is, of course, not without flaws. On the minus side, I would mention Aron's superficial knowledge of pre-1917 Russia, which deprives *Yeltsin* of historical depth. Curiously, he pays more attention to the French revolution of 1789 than to the Russian one of 1917. And there are numerous minor but irritating mistakes in historical allusions.

Unfortunately, too, the narrative slows with the beginning of Yeltsin's second term and ends abruptly in late 1997. Since the final, catastrophic two years of his administration are gone over rapidly, Aron is able to offer a rather too sanguine assessment of Yeltsin's overall achievement. The book's concluding chapter, "In Search of a Historical Yeltsin," is a 50-page paean to the creator of a new Russia, the man who has broken definitively with the legacy of authoritarian rule, militarism, and imperial expansion. Indeed, Yeltsin is compared here with no lesser a historical figure than Abraham Lincoln.

I believe history will not judge Yeltsin so grandly. Undeniably, he tried to replace the defunct totalitarian state with democracy, and he succeeded in demolishing the work of Lenin and Stalin to the point where a revival of Communism in Russia appears virtually inconceivable. But, as Jean-François Revel has said, "escaping the consequences of Communism is harder than escaping Communism itself."

Yeltsin's enemy was not just the Communist apparatus, to which he delivered the coup de grâce, but the mentality of the Russian people—a mentality shaped by centuries of arbitrary authority and lawlessness that 70 years of Communist rule had only served to reinforce. This enemy he did not in the end fight, but joined. If, in the late 1980's, Yeltsin's keen political sense had told him that the country yearned for democracy, so in the late 1990's it delivered a different message: Russia craved a strong hand, and the restoration of its pride as a great power. As he had listened to vox populi then, so he listened again; this time, it propelled him rightward.

Yeltsin's greatest disservices to Russian democracy occurred during the last year: first, resuming, on specious pretexts, the offensive against Chechnya, and then, three months later, resigning in favor of his handpicked successor, Vladimir Putin. In so doing, Yeltsin moved up the presidential elections from June to March, making it difficult for rival candidates to organize, and giving Putin the opportunity for three months to serve as the country's acting head of state. In the light of Russians' awe of government authority, this will make a defeat of Putin appear to be a virtual coup d'état. Already his people have hinted that a vote against the acting president in the midst of a war against Chechen "terrorists" would be an unpatriotic act.

To judge by some of his public pronouncements, Putin stands for everything that Yeltsin, in his earlier incarnation, fought against. He believes that Russia is not ready for democracy—that what it needs is "the restoration of a guiding and regulatory role of the state." In his view, the state should intervene in the economy; the security services are a bulwark of statehood; and the improvement of the nation's economy requires a substantial increase in military spending. This successor to the man who a decade ago had adopted the United States as his model in nearly everything is an ex-KGB spy who seems to regard the United States with deep suspicion.

The first decree Putin signed after assuming office was to grant Yeltsin immunity from prosecution for serious charges of corruption. Aside from everything else, one cannot help wondering what has happened to the principle of "one law for all," so bravely proclaimed by Boris Yeltsin a mere ten years ago.

I suspect that as Russia slides back into its old habits, future generations will see Yeltsin as an astute politician rather than as a statesman and father of democracy.

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Coming in With Their Hands Up

A Story

Joseph Epstein

I'M STANDING in line for a Coke and a hot dog during halftime at a Bulls-Knicks game when I can't help eavesdropping on two guys in line just ahead of me. They're Canadians, as my father, in a helpful code word, used to call Jews—"Not many Canadians here tonight," he'd say as we entered a restaurant—in their forties, expensively dressed. One of them has what looks like a hundred-dollar haircut, lots of well-curried black curls running down the back of his thick neck onto the collar of a twelve-hundred-dollar Armani suit. The other guy's short and mostly bald, but with a little ponytail; he's also wearing at least three grand in clothes. They take good care of themselves, these boys; they have that East Bank Health Club look. Both are wearing clunky Rolex watches and very soft black leather loafers. Maybe they're in the commodities market, maybe they inherited golden businesses from their fathers.

"Kimmy's going ahead with the divorce," the guy with the haircut says to the guy with the ponytail. "She tells me she's had it. She's gone to a lawyer."

"Who'd she go to?" his pal asks.

"A guy named Allen Bernstein."

"Jesus!" the guy with the ponytail says. "Allen Bernstein takes no prisoners. Might as well come in with your hands up and hope you can come away with your Bulls tickets and a couple of extra sets of underwear."

"Really? No shit?"

"No shit. Allen Bernstein's a fiend, a killer."

I'm Allen Bernstein. I've been a divorce lawyer in Chicago for 30 years, and I listened to this conversation with calm but deep pleasure. I considered it a fine piece of free advertising. To be a lawyer is bad enough, but to be a lawyer specializing in divorce, let's face it, is to incur double enmity: to be despised by most people for your profession and by your fellow lawyers for your specialty within the profession. When I started out and someone asked me what I did, I used to have to steel myself before saying. No more.

Nobody sets out to become a divorce lawyer. I got into it because of the limited possibilities open to me when I graduated from DePaul Law School in 1962. My father was a union plumber, the first licensed Jewish plumber in the city. After I graduated from Von Steuben, in Albany Park, I thought about acquiring a license myself, but at the last minute decided instead on Wright Junior College (can't go wrong with Wright, they used to say), mainly because I wasn't ready to go to work. After finishing I went on to Roosevelt University, on Michigan Avenue in the Loop, but I remember less about what happened in the classroom than about the never-ending gin games in the student lounge: a penny a point, Hollywood-Oklahoma, spades double, big stakes in those days. My major was political science, please don't ask me why.

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When I graduated, I still wasn't ready for work, so I applied to DePaul and was accepted. I worked odd jobs—selling shoes at Maling's at night, construction in the summer—to pay my way. The big goal at DePaul was to pass the bar. The time they gave you for answering questions on exams was limited to thirteen minutes—the exact amount allotted on the Illinois bar exam.

Graduate, pass the bar, start making some dough. Sights were set no higher, which was fine by me. The big law firms weren't interested in guys from DePaul, unless maybe you had a political or family connection, and I didn't have either one. I finished around the middle of my class. No one was recruiting me; I'd have to make it on my own. I wasn't particularly interested in any specialty, except that I didn't want to be stuck behind a desk doing estates or trusts or some dry crap like that. I was also pretty sure I didn't have the skill, or the instinct, to be a full-time litigator. After passing the bar I was officially a "professional man," but unemployed.

I had an Uncle Bernie, my mother's brother, a bookie, and among his clients were some of the Jewish high flyers in the Chicago of those days. They included two brothers, Marvin and Jack Brent—"originally Brodsky," my uncle volunteered—who were divorce lawyers. They were said to have made a ton of money. They were also said to be very tough. My uncle used the same phrase about them that the guy at the Bulls game would use about me—"Your wife hires the Brent brothers in a divorce suit, you might as well come in with your hands up"—which may be why it pleased me so much to hear it again, this time about me, after all those years. Anyhow, Uncle Bernie arranged for me to meet the younger Brent brother, Jack.

When I phoned, he said he couldn't clear time in the office but we could talk that night at the Raphael Hotel on Delaware, east of Michigan, where he lived. He could give me fifteen minutes, no more. I was to meet him in the lobby at 6:30. I would recognize him, he said, and hung up without bothering to say good-bye.

I WAS twenty minutes early; he was ten minutes late. But he was right about recognizing him. His suit was the giveaway: lush gray, a three-piece job, nipped in at the waist, with sharp, exaggerated lapels. It looked simultaneously soft yet armored, and flashed extremely expensive. (Jack and his brother Marvin, I later learned, had these suits made by a guy on Michigan Avenue named George Mashbitz, who used to tailor for the actor Forrest Tucker, the gossip columnist Irving Kupcinet, and others who kept a locker for their cigars in the humidor room at Dunhill's.) He carried a Chesterfield coat over his arm, and in his hand—you'll have to believe me on this—held a pearl-gray homburg. He was tall, very erect, bald, with a blotchy, pinkish-purplish complexion. The effect was pure shyster.

"I'm running late, kid," he said, after I introduced myself. "But I can give you a few minutes. Sit down over here." He pointed to two facing couches.

"So whaddya want?" he began, carefully setting down his Chesterfield and homburg.

"I want to know about the opportunities in divorce law."

"Mostly they're opportunities to see human beings at their most disgraceful. Also to be widely despised—by your adversaries, your colleagues, and usually in the end your clients. And there are opportunities to show the highest contempt for the law, which in this field is pretty goddamn disgusting, by forcing everyone to lie, cheat, and do what he can to screw the other party. Those are the opportunities. Next question."

"Why are you in it?"

"For the money, which, if you cull your clientele carefully, can be staggeringly high. Next question." He looked at his watch, a wafer-thin, gold job with small diamonds for numbers.

"Do you and your brother have any other lawyers working for you?"

"Why? You looking for work?"

"I am."

"How hungry are you?"

"Very," I heard myself say. Strange, but not until that precise moment did I realize that I wanted to be rich: not making a decent living, not being "comfortable," but rich, really rich.

"I'll talk to my brother. Maybe we could use a young guy to run errands. You'd be strictly a gopher at first, you understand. Low pay, maybe a hundred a week. Just because the Brent brothers make a lot doesn't mean we like to give it away." He looked at his watch again. "I gotta be out of here," he said, gathering up his coat and hat. "My brother's in New York till late next week. Call me at the beginning of the following week, and I'll see if we have anything for you."

When I called, I got the job. Only they paid me not a hundred bucks a week but sixty-five: no George Mashbitz suits for me. Marvin Brent, three years older than Jack, had even darker views and less in the way of a sense of humor. The Brent brothers, bachelors, kept adjoining suites in the Raphael, and drove matching black Fleetwoods. They had no interest in politics or even the news, didn't care about food, saw no family. Each took a one-week vaca-

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tion—never together—and went to New York to see musical comedies. (For reasons I could never figure out, they had this thing about musicals.) During the five years that I worked for them, neither, so far as I could make out, had anything approaching a serious relationship with a woman. I assume they availed themselves of expensive hookers.

As I soon discovered, they used the services of these ladies fairly often in their business. In those days, before no-fault came into being, divorce in Illinois could be obtained on four grounds only: adultery, desertion (technically, for a year), physical cruelty, and mental cruelty. The Brent brothers' clients were almost exclusively Jewish, and Jews didn't do physical cruelty. To get a divorce for mental cruelty, you had to come up with more exquisite tortures than Alfred Hitchcock—it practically couldn't be done. Desertion was an option, but many people didn't want to wait out the full year or more—especially the men, who often had a tootsie in the wings to whom extravagant and urgent promises had been made.

That left adultery. We staged lots of adulteries, usually at the Bismark Hotel on Randolph. The guy caught in bed with a naked woman, the schlocky private detective, the photographer—the whole comic bit. I served as director, if not yet producer, for many of these farces.

The hookers got fifty bucks for the assignment. (We billed the clients $500 and put it under the category of clerical services.) The girls tended to be big and brassy, in the pin-up style of the day, with names like Rusty, Pam, or Babs. I paid them in cash, and would occasionally take them out afterward to O'Connell's on Rush Street for coffee and a sandwich. The conversation often touched on celebrity tricks they had turned. Some had slept with guys who played for the Bears. One was a regular stop for Desi Arnez when he came to Chicago. "What's he like?" I asked her. "Desi?" she said, putting down her coffee cup and dragging on a cigarette. "A real pig."

As a rule, the Brent brothers preferred women to men as clients. It made more sense to sue the men, since they had the money. "We'll gently squeeze his nuts," was a favorite expression of Marvin Brent's, "then add the serious pressure later." (I could never hear him say this without feeling a stab in my own groin.) Most of these clients were sent over by larger firms that declined divorce cases because they didn't want what used to be called a reception-room problem—some broad sitting there, crying, red-faced, Kleenex all over the joint, while corporate clients were waiting on heavy-billing business. It was undignified. Marvin and Jack Brent didn't care about dignity.

I was surprised at first by how comforting they could be to these women. Once they decided to take a case—and the only ones I ever saw them turn down involved husbands without enough money to be worth their while—they made it plain that the husband was the enemy and the Brothers Brent were ready to nail the son of a bitch to the wall. Who knows, right now the guy was probably holding back, spending it on a girlfriend. The main thing was to listen to their advice and not soften in any way. In the end, their client would live as well as when she was married, maybe even a little better. Nothing they hated more than reconciliations, and they did everything they could to prevent them. Women who went into Marvin or Jack Brent's office with Kleenex in hand came out smiling—the sly smile of vengeance anticipated.

The husbands, on the other hand, had blood in their eyes. In court, they would mutter—sometimes, more than mutter, hurl—the roughest insults they could come up with at Jack or Marvin. Occasionally an anonymous caller threatened to beat up or even murder one of them.

One day I'm sitting in the reception room waiting to meet a friend for lunch when a man named Louis Schoenwald, a little guy, dapper, in his early sixties, comes in and asks to speak to Jack Brent.

"May I inquire on what business?" says Sylvia, our receptionist.

"Mr. Brent is representing my wife, Nancy," he says, calmly.

"I'm sorry," Sylvia answers, "but Mr. Brent doesn't see the husbands or wives of clients except by appointment."

"Very well," says Mr. Schoenwald. "I can understand that. I'll call for an appointment." He turns toward the door and begins to walk out when suddenly he pivots and races down the hall. Next thing I hear is a door slamming and Jack calls out, "Get this bastard off me, goddamnit." I run down the hall to find Schoenwald on the desk, on top of Jack, his hands around his neck, Jack's face turning from his normal purplish-red to pure maroon.

After a serious struggle I manage to pull Schoenwald off, walking him out of the office in a hammerlock. "I'll kill him," he's screaming, "the cocksucker doesn't deserve to live." That's what I mean by a reception-room problem.

Marvin and Jack Brent died roughly six years later, within seven months of each other, both of cancer of the prostate. I had left them two years earlier, to go in for myself. They threw me a

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bit of work, fish too small for their expensive nets. I sent them kickbacks. Marvin died first, and an obit appeared in the *Trib* complete with picture in which he looked, as in life, menacingly well-groomed. No services were held; no request for contributions to the Cancer Research Foundation or anywhere else. I sent Jack a note of condolence, but never received an answer. When Jack died, the obit in the *Trib* was smaller, again no service announced. What could possibly be said about him, I wondered, and then remembered the old joke about the guy no one was willing to eulogize at his funeral until finally some other geezer gets up and announces, in a strong Yiddish accent, "His brudder was even woise."

As for me, by the time I opened my own office—Allen Bernstein & Associates—divorce law in Illinois had begun to change, and so had the clientele. No-fault, with its assumption (sensible enough in theory, I suppose) that there isn't always a clear villain in the breakup of a marriage, opened the floodgates to some very peculiar characters. Where before divorce tended to be a game for the rich, now everyone wanted to play. With the craziness of the 60's, there was a feeling in the air that everything was possible.

It was all very good for business. Suddenly people began appearing in my office wanting to get out of marriages because . . . well, they weren't really sure why. In the vast majority of cases I could have told them: they thought they were missing out on better screwing elsewhere.

TOO CRUDE? You wouldn't think so if you heard their stories. One Friday afternoon a woman in her late thirties, her name's Susan, comes in for help. Her husband, his name's Howard, he's a CPA. They live in Highland Park, which suggests he's a pretty good provider. They have two kids, a boy and girl, both under ten. She doesn't work, has never held a job.

"Is Howard cheating on you?"

"Not that I know of," she says.

"Is he beating you up, or maybe he's what is called mentally cruel?"

"Neither," she says.

"Is he incapacitated in any way?"

"No."

"Well, what precisely is your complaint?"

"When Howard takes off his glasses for sex," she says, "I want to laugh."

"I see," not seeing at all. "Maybe you could tell me a little more."

"I mean," she says, "how can I make love to a man when I want to laugh at him?"

"Let me get this straight. You want to leave your husband because he takes off his glasses to make love to you and without his glasses on he makes you laugh? This is your complaint?"

"Yes," she says.

"What about contact lenses?" I ask.

"It wouldn't be the same," she says, finally getting to the point. "Besides, I'm in love with someone else."

It turns out the guy she's in love with is fifteen years younger and plays in a rock band and isn't employed, at least just now. But he's wonderful at tie-dye. She'd like to keep the house in Highland Park and the Mercedes. She wouldn't mind working, she's thought about getting a teaching certificate, but jobs in the northern suburbs aren't easy to come by and then, she figures, maybe it makes more sense to stay home with the kids, for whom these are important years.

I was able to get her just about everything she wanted, with the exception of the Mercedes. Poor Howard, I assume, recovered and is today happily blinking away in some other woman's bed.

But the ladies were nothing next to the men. When they came in with their hair grown over their ears, I knew it was unload-the-little-woman time. They had hundreds of different excuses, wild, elaborate, comic excuses. Most had other, much younger women lined up. One guy has the nerve to tell me that, since his wife's mastectomy, he can no longer perform in bed, and, this being the case, it doesn't seem fair to her that they stay together. Then he goes on to outline a plan involving shifting his assets so as to leave his wife about enough for a studio apartment in a less than safe neighborhood near Wilson Avenue. I got him, too, what he wanted.

You don't have to be long in the business to understand that, once it becomes clear one party wants out, it's pig time. True, every once in a while, some guy, out of extreme guilt over his really outrageous behavior, comes in ready to give the store away. But then it becomes my job to discourage him. I paint his future if he allows himself to become a hostage to the woman who will soon be his ex-wife. Before long, most of them come around; at the first strong demand, teeth flash and they're ready to take off the gloves.

My success is that I understand my role as an absolute client's man. I'm no public-relations guy, and I don't mind being unyielding to the point of rigidity in my demands. When I finally close up this practice, I don't expect to include good will among its assets; there isn't going to be any. No sportsmanship trophies in matrimonial law. What I learned from the Brent brothers is that it doesn't matter what other lawyers and their clients or even the judges think of

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you. There's only one point: winning, which means getting your clients what they want and making them pay you well for it. As the guy in the ponytail said, if your wife hires Allen Bernstein, you might as well come in with your hands up.

WHY ANYONE would want to *marry* a divorce lawyer is itself something of a mystery—comparable in its way, I suppose, to a woman marrying a gynecologist. After dealing professionally with it all day, you can't expect a man to have too much enthusiasm for it in his private life.

I didn't marry until my fifties—fifty-two, to be precise. Leslee, eighteen years younger, hadn't been married before, so she wasn't a client—I had long ago made it a policy not to fool with a female client, though God knows the opportunities were plentiful. She was the only daughter of Ben Lerman, who had started out in life as a glazier and made a fortune insuring commercial glass, then lost it when he expanded too quickly into lines of work he knew little about, including becoming a major stockholder in Arlington racetrack, which went under in a swamp of politics and corruption.

Like my old man, Ben was a working stiff, a dirt-under-the-nails man. Though in another age he probably would have preferred to keep her home, he had sent his daughter off to college—the University of Illinois—where she was a sorority girl. He and I got along. He was not so secretly pleased that his daughter, at thirty-four, was finally getting married, and to a Jewish guy, a lawyer, a professional man. I made a good living; that's all he needed to know. In marrying me, his girl had come into safe harbor.

I'm not sure why Leslee was still unmarried. She's good-looking, *zaftig*, brunette, big eyes, with a gentle, feminine manner, a papa's girl. She taught third grade at Boone School in West Rogers Park. The kids in her class—Greeks, East Indians, Russians, lower-middle-class Jews—were crazy about her, and she about them. She would buy things at her own expense—art supplies, music tapes, books—to enliven her classes, and three times a week brought pastries for the entire class. I used to joke with her that she was the only person in history who might have to declare Chapter 11 from a teaching job. When I first began taking her out she lived with two other girls, sorority sisters, on Surf Avenue.

I was forty-nine when we first met, and I had seen my run of Jewish women—from the nutsy all the way to those strictly in business for themselves. It was at a wedding: Leslee knew the bride, the groom was a former client of mine entering into his third marriage. I was now living at the Raphael, on the floor above the Brent brothers' old suites. I was also billing somewhere in the neighborhood of $2 million a year, which, in an office with no partners, wasn't too shabby. I somehow found myself attracted to this girl, with her appealing sweetness of nature: a case, I suppose, of opposites attracting. I decided to pursue her, but gently, carefully; a full-court press, I sensed, would be a mistake.

The first time I took Leslee out, we went to a movie and dinner. We began to go to Bulls games in the old Chicago Stadium. If there was a play in town, we might take that in. She asked me about my business, and I filled her in on the more outrageous cases, which I thought had a certain entertainment value. But she really didn't want to believe that people could behave so badly. She talked about her students in a way that made these little Jagdishes and Dimitris and Laliths come alive for me. Once, picking her up at school, I saw her help a little Indian girl who had a fleck of something in her eye; her gentleness, the child's complete confidence in her, were something to behold. As she got into the car she seemed exhilarated—and more beautiful than ever. I felt a flash of jealousy.

We didn't sleep together for three months. (Later she told me she'd begun to worry about me.) When we did, things went fine, maybe even a little better than fine. Eventually, marriage became one of our subjects. A bachelor in his fifties becomes a very careful scrutinizer of female flaws. I felt too old to make a serious mistake, and I searched Leslee for things that, down the road, would make life with her a torture. The flaws I found, I decided, were of a kind I could live with, and some—her unworldliness, her hatred of confrontations, her weakness for all children—I found endearing.

What she saw in me, a guy almost twenty years her senior, no beauty, who'd been around the block more than a few times, I didn't know. One day I asked. "Because," Leslee said, "I felt you loved me more than any man I had ever met or ever would meet. And I knew that I could always count on you to protect me." Babe, I thought to myself, you're dead right.

THE RAPHAEL, loaded with well-off elderly Jewish widows, was no place for a married couple. We looked at a few townhouses in Lincoln Park, but it soon became clear that Leslee favored a house in the suburbs. She wanted children of her own, and the sooner the better. No argument. Leslee without children never seemed a serious possibility, though I have to say I hadn't pictured myself a father. I'd probably seen too many clients ready to use their kids as weapons in divorce bat-

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tles, or refusing to pay for their upkeep, or subjecting them to the humiliation of living together with new and often very temporary lovers.

Leslee agreed that I was too old for a big wedding, and besides, as I pointed out to her, only half-joking, it would be a bad advertisement for my business. We put the money instead into a $900,000 house on Beach Road just off the lake in Glencoe, a house with six bedrooms, a family room, a huge yard, space for lots of children, dogs—the full catastrophe, as I remember Anthony Quinn calling family life in that movie he did about the Greek.

Leslee's calm and sweetness played off strangely against the greed and emotional squalor of my clients' lives. Which was reality: my good-hearted, naturally refined wife, or the people making use of my services to elude their responsibilities or to tighten the screws on people they once claimed to love? Before Leslee, I would have said that reality was what went on in my office. Living with her made me a little less sure.

"Have you ever felt you wanted to practice another kind of law?" she once asked me.

"I don't know another kind, sweetheart," I said. "Besides, I'm good at what I do, and there's a lot of satisfaction in that. Not to speak of the income, which may just turn out to be useful to our grandchildren."

But before you can have grandchildren, you have to have children, and here we ran into a little glitch, an unexpected jiggeroo. We planned to have kids right away, or almost right away. Leslee's hope was to be in her seventh month in June, when school let out for the year, so that she could have her first child in late summer. She planned not to return to teaching, at least not soon. We never spoke about how many children we would have, but I always assumed at least two. I'm still not sure exactly how many she had in mind.

The problem was that Leslee couldn't seem to get pregnant. After a year, her gynecologist put her on pills and a careful surveillance of her temperature and body rhythms. During this period, called in at odd times from the sidelines, I felt like a field-goal kicker. When Leslee phoned in the middle of the morning to announce she needed the services of George Blanda, the old Chicago Bears kicker and our private name for my crucial function, I would tell my secretary to cancel my appointments, have the garage bring my Porsche around, and speed home. It was fun for a while, but it began to get grim after nearly a year had gone by and nothing productive happened.

Our next step was a fertility specialist. I'll spare you the details, but they finally discovered that, even though my appetite and performance were normal, my counts were too low to produce a child. Although I was ready to adopt, Leslee put the quietus on any such idea. Her students were already her adopted children, she said, and she wanted to raise kids of her own—and mine. On this point, she was adamant, absolutely inflexible. There were other possibilities, and I was willing to consider any of them, but Leslee wasn't.

Never for a moment did she so much as hint that this sadness in her life was my fault. We rolled around in our large house, with its extra bedrooms that we both now knew would never be filled. She continued teaching. My practice filled out my days. In the summer we traveled, though I found I didn't like being away from the office for very long. One night, at the George V in Paris, I awoke to discover my wife weeping gently in her sleep; I thought of waking her, but there was, finally, nothing I could do to make things better.

In my business, I have seen too many older men who marry younger women and have to face the question of children. Often these men have had kids with their first wives, and have no interest in starting another family. Just as often, the women enter into an implicit bargain with them, a cruel pre-nup that never gets put on paper. In my opinion it's a bad deal—always a mistake for a young woman, leading sometimes to heartbreak, frequently to rancor, inevitably to disappointment. Leslee and I had made no such deal; quite the contrary. Still, having to go through life without children seemed to me a hell she shouldn't be made to bear. It seemed, somehow, impermissible.

After three years of marriage, I knew in my heart what I had to do. The question was how to go about it. In the old days, I might have called in the bimbos and staged a full Brent Bros. production at the old Bismark Hotel, with myself in the male lead and copies of the photos sent to Leslee. A campaign of mental cruelty—systematically ignoring her at home, humiliating her in public—would have taken too long, and I couldn't have done it even if I wanted to. Feigning impotence, given my feelings for her, was not in the cards. That left announcing that I'd found someone I loved more and needed my freedom.

Of course I would make the actual proceedings as painless as possible, and I would see to it that she had enough money to live well and make her even more attractive to the man who would give her children while there was still time—even more attractive, that is, than she already was. Leslee, sweetheart, my own, my true love, forgive me. I'm coming in with my hands up.

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OBSERVATIONS

Close Encounters of the Harvard Kind

Samuel McCracken

OVER THE last 50 years, the skies of popular culture have been alight with flying saucers—disk-shaped interplanetary craft operated by small beings of vaguely humanoid (if decidedly nonstandard) physiognomy and ambivalent intentions toward us earthlings. Until comparatively recently, though, these flying objects remained a fringe phenomenon—in the sense that, generally speaking, those who took them seriously were not themselves the sorts of people likely to be taken seriously. This has begun to change.

In 1994, John E. Mack, M.D., a well-regarded professor of psychiatry at the Harvard Medical School and the winner of a Pulitzer prize for his 1977 biography of T.E. Lawrence, published a book, *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*, in which people asserting they had been kidnapped by alien creatures in spaceships were considered to be sanely reporting on actual experiences. Now, in *Passport to the Cosmos: Human Transformation and Alien Encounters*,* Mack has taken another step; such alien encounters, he argues, are an expression of a large and hopeful truth about our age.

When an individual with Mack's credentials promulgates ideas normally found at the grocery checkout stand, it is worth paying heed.

BEFORE WORLD WAR II, interplanetary and intergalactic travel, bringing the possibility of extraterrestrial visitors to earth, was the stuff of science fiction. Although prewar cognoscenti understood that building gravity-escaping ships was a problem merely of engineering, not until Werner von Braun helped Hitler demonstrate rockets-in-being did the idea of visitors from elsewhere begin to assume plausibility.

Coincidentally, World War II also taught Americans (with the aid of books like the 1942 *What's That Plane: How to Identify American and Jap Airplanes*) to scan the skies for intrusive objects. As thousands spent their spare hours scrutinizing the heavens, it was inevitable that spotters in, say, western Kansas would report sightings that conformed to no filed flight plan and that, given geographic realities, could not be hostile aircraft. In fact if not yet in terminology, these were unidentified flying objects (UFO's).

After the war, the government turned its attention to such continued sightings, identifying nine out of ten as mundane entities like helicopters or weather balloons. But that left 10 percent, some of them reputedly saucer-shaped spacecraft manned by little green (later to become gray) men. Perhaps most famously, one was said to have crashed at Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947, killing its crew. The bodies, allegedly, ended up in the possession of the federal authorities; when the air force persisted in denying the entire episode, charges of cover-up predictably ensued.

In short order, UFO's and their crews provided the stuff for a cottage industry, engendering sensational books and forming a staple of supermarket tabloids and paperbacks. Among the latter was John G. Fuller's *The Interrupted Journey* (1966), the tale of a New Hampshire couple,

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* Crown, 306 pp., $24.00.

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Betty and Barney Hill, who claimed to have been abducted by space aliens while driving through the White Mountains. The Hill abduction case established the format for many subsequent narratives whose elements typically included little gray men with huge eyes that wrapped around their heads from front to side and who told their abductees that they were here to help; various invasive, quasi-medical procedures; and the abductees' "recovery" of these and similar memories through hypnosis.

In 1977, the theme of alien abduction crossed over from nonfiction to fiction in Steven Spielberg's immensely successful movie, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. This is the tale of a group of humans who singly and severally observe UFO's and develop an obsession with drawing or modeling a mound-like structure. It emerges that space aliens have implanted in them an image of the Devil's Tower, a striking geological formation in Wyoming to which they are meant to travel to attend a public appearance by an alien ship. When the ship duly lands, the aliens disembark a number of U.S. aviators missing since 1945, as well as the child of one of the psychically implanted humans. In appearance, the aliens conform to the little gray (or blue) stereotype, complete with frail bodies and oversized eyes.

Another landmark appeared ten years later in the form of a nonfiction book entitled *Communion: A True Story*. Its author, a novelist named Whitley Strieber, had been known principally for high-quality thrillers on pacifist and environmentalist themes. Now Strieber claimed to have been mysteriously transported from his upstate New York hideaway into a space ship where he was examined intrusively and then just as mysteriously returned to his bedroom. This proved to be only the first of many encounters with the creatures Strieber called "the visitors," and whom he divided into four separate types. The predominant species would have been familiar to the Hills: about three-and-a-half feet tall, with distended heads, large black oval eyes, rudimentary noses, and thin mouths. The cover art for *Communion* provided what is now the standard iconography of these creatures, including the gray cast of their skin and their jumpsuit-like clothing.

Since *Communion*, Strieber has produced a series of books elaborating upon his ongoing contacts with the visitors—plus his "recovery" that, as a child, he was educated in a secret school near San Antonio, Texas, where he learned to detach his soul from his body and visit such locales as Mars and ancient Rome. He believes that the visitors implant objects of unknown purpose in the bodies of humans, and has detailed his own somewhat ambiguous attempts to remove such an implant from his left ear. The subject of these implants takes up a large part of *Confirmation* (1998), in which Strieber alleges that their existence confirms the truth of the experiences he and others have recounted.

Considering the sensationalist fabric of his claims, Strieber's tone is remarkably calm. (Many of his fans appear to treat him as a kind of engaging and benign fabulator, a sort of latter-day Wizard of Oz.) He agreeably supplies possible mundane explanations for the tales he tells, while also reporting that he has successfully undergone psychological testing to explore his sanity and polygraph testing to explore his veracity. His website (www.strieber.com), however, tells a somewhat different story, replete with complaints of persecution by his bankers and railings against the media. A posted entry from his journal for December 4, 1999, conveys the essential flavor:

> I am about to suffer from the same press torments that have dogged me since I published *Communion*. I am routinely punished for writing that book, either by false and unfair reviews, or by being ignored. . . . I am hurt as much as possible short of legal limits in order to limit my impact and, in the best of all possible worlds, destroy me.

WHETHER OR not Strieber is sane, to him belongs the distinction of having formulated and widely disseminated the standard version of the alien-abduction phenomenon. For nearly a decade, moreover, he occupied the *moderate* position on the spectrum, the extreme being held down by tabloids enlivened by such matters as the First Lady's plans to adopt a space-alien child. But then, in 1994, the whole debate acquired a certain *gravitas* with the arrival of Harvard University's John E. Mack.

Abduction, Mack's first book on the subject, was superficially structured like many popular psychiatric works—that is, as a series of case studies. We learn that a number of particularly interesting people had been consulting him professionally since 1990. They were a diverse group—including, among others, a waitress and an immensely successful venture capitalist—but what they had in common was the suspicion or the belief that they had been through exactly the sort of experience reported by Whitley Strieber. Mack customarily hypnotized these people, with the goal of recovering painful memories they might have repressed.

But here the resemblance to psychiatric case studies ended. For Mack did not *treat* his subjects; in fact, he did not believe they were in need of treatment, or consider them patients. In his new book, *Passport to the Cosmos*, he refers to them instead as "fellow researchers," and he begins this book by announcing that, since the recollections of his clients did not fit his previous worldview, it came to seem reasonable to him to alter that worldview rather than "continue to force my clients into molds that clearly did not suit them."

There are, Mack tells us, a num-

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ber of common elements in abduction narratives. Typically, the "experience" begins with bright light, and experiencers see the aliens themselves as "beings of light." They also report powerful and unfamiliar energies: things shake, and experiencers "feel" their bodies, their very cells, vibrating at a higher rate. As for the aliens' "program," or message, this usually has to do with the natural environment—namely, that we on earth are heading for trouble if we do not get serious about curtailing pollution. Sometimes experiencers are shown images of a desolated planet: either a future earth or what the aliens did to their own planet and want us to avoid. (In general, Mack's evidence seems to suggest that the aliens have been profoundly influenced by Vice President Gore's *Earth in the Balance*.)

For purposes not entirely clear, the aliens have often collected samples of semen or eggs aboard their ships, and many female experiencers say they have been impregnated with fertilized eggs containing alien genetic material. These impregnations appear to be accomplished by thoroughly clinical means, the fetuses being removed by the aliens during subsequent abductions. Some experiencers report having seen large incubator installations (remarkably similar to those depicted by Aldous Huxley in his dystopian novel, *Brave New World*), while others, evidently having been granted visitation rights, recount ongoing relationships with their hybrid children either aboard ship or in other, unspecified, locations. These sundry activities comprise what Mack calls the Hybrid Project.

In working his way to a set of conclusions from all this reportage, Mack invites us to consider the role of the shaman—the medicine-man figure in primitive cultures who undergoes rigorous training to allow spirit travel into other realities. He discusses the work of three shamans known to him—an American Indian, a Brazilian Indian, and a Zulu (the first of these is a former Green Beret, the second has a Ph.D. in anthropology), the point being to show us that in other cultures, contact with otherworldly beings is routine. "Indigenous people," to use Mack's term, retain knowledge of the "original instructions" of the Creation, and are therefore more in touch with reality than nonindigenous people, who suffer under the burden of the millennia of miseducation otherwise known as civilization.

This brings Mack at last to God—or, to use the term favored by experiencers, to Source—and the big cultural news he wants to tell us. Many of Mack's informants have come to believe that they are not from here, but rather from There. "The ship is my home," one of them says. "I miss my home." Though raised in a rigorously rational and secular Jewish home, Mack himself has arrived at the conviction that we are in a period of spiritual transformation, of which the abduction phenomenon is a powerful engine. Although the aliens (he concedes) are not God, they are nearer to God—to Source—than even the most religious among us; making contact with them, and through them with Source, may thus be the real meaning of the entire phenomenon. He ends by quoting a certain Karin, one of his prize experiencers, as she addresses a meeting of the Friends of the Institute of Noetic Sciences:

> Perhaps it is that we have found ourselves at a fork in the road, and we are once again faced with making a choice. Couldn't we, this time, make the right one? Couldn't we simply reach out and embrace this experience and all that it brings with it, including the terror, as well as the truth, questions and beauty? . . . Please, can't we just this once choose the path that will finally set us free?

MANY A psychiatrist, dealing with a patient who claims to have been kidnapped by space aliens and to have had a second personality implanted in his body, might open the diagnostic manual at "S," for schizophrenia. Mack—not for nothing is he a professor of psychiatry at Harvard—is well aware that he must show his experiencers are not crazy. To this end, he diverts us with expositions concerning the workings of his research institute, the testing methods followed by his clinical associates, his screening procedures, and the extent of his erudition as evidenced in multitudinous citations of scholarly sources. Unfortunately, his research procedures evince flaws that even a nontenured alien intruder would recognize.

Mack asserts, first of all, that his own strong suit as a therapist has been the talent for distinguishing the sane from the insane—and that, besides, his experiencers perform well on standardized intelligence and Rorschach tests. Next, he states that as experiencers relate to him their astonishing and sometimes terrifying memories, their "affect" is perfectly appropriate to the narrative: they are deeply emotional, and they evince great physical tension. Moreover, since the story they recount is generally the same, with much circumstantial agreement among individual versions, they must be describing a common reality. Finally, and just to bring things around again, these matters cannot be examined by traditional methods: in the words of the anthropologist Jeremy Narby, quoted approvingly by Mack, "To change what we see, it is sometimes necessary to change what we believe."

Should we take John Mack's word for it that he knows a madman when he sees one? What if he is himself mad, or perhaps under the influence of an implant? That, at least, might explain the tenacity with which he clings to the notion that emotional affect—"sincerity"—validates the tales told by his experiencers.

In 1692, the adolescent girls of Salem cried out that they had been bewitched by their neighbors; clearly they were possessed by something

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very important to them, and they manifested all the physical tensions that Mack finds so authenticating. Cotton Mather, the most distinguished American intellectual of his day, was hardly alone in being impressed by the suffering of the "afflicted children" as they confronted their "tormentors" in the courtroom. But no one believes in the spectral persecutions for which the good burghers of Salem went to the gallows.

The Salem "experiencers" are relevant in another regard as well. They all told a remarkably congruent story, leading to the possible conclusion that they, too, were describing a common reality. But the fact is that within days after Betty Parris and Abigail Williams made their first accusations, every teenaged girl in Salem knew what sort of narrative, if told in the courtroom with the right effects, would make her an instant celebrity. It is not necessary to believe that the girls consciously and deliberately fabricated their accounts to understand that the mere fact they told the same story says nothing at all about whether the story was true.

Indeed, considering how long the theme of alien abduction has been available in sources both literary and cinematic, it is odd that a Harvard professor boasting of his analytical acumen should have failed to inquire into the possible *non*-experiential roots of his clients' narratives. Consider, in this connection, the case of the Zeta Reticulans.

Betty Hill, the 1961 "abductee" who with her late husband was, so to speak, the patient zero of the phenomenon, reported that one of the aliens aboard ship showed her a star map indicating his home area, and she later made a sketch of it from memory. Several years later, an amateur astronomer named Marjorie Fish applied herself to finding an actual piece of space corresponding with Hill's map. One that satisfied her lay in the vicinity of Zeta Reticuli, a fifth-magnitude double star in the southern constellation known as the Net. Fish's work was taken sufficiently seriously to have generated a 1974 article in the popular journal *Astronomy* averring that her match was very unlikely to occur randomly. Other commentators, including the late Carl Sagan, disagreed rather sharply.

From this beginning, the alien-abduction community has since produced manifold detailed accounts of the lives and loves of the Zeta Reticulans, many of them "channeled" from Zeta Reticuli itself. (A "channel" is a sort of medium who transmits personalities from places and times to which physical travel is not yet available.) A quick search of the Web turns up over 650 hits for the topic, many containing dozens of links to other sites.

What the Zeta Reticuli phenomenon illustrates, in other words, is the immense fertility of minds that truly believe. From a small hint in one abduction narrative there has grown a vast deposit of "fact" about an alleged home planet of the "grays" and about the life they lead there. It is tempting to wonder whether a star with a less allusive name would have been so effective. Snodgrass 242, for example?

But the Hill abduction is the locus of an even more illuminating example of "life" imitating art. The wraparound eyes that are the distinguishing mark of the "grays" first appeared to the world in John G. Fuller's 1966 account of the Hill abduction. It turns out, however, that Betty Hill's notes, written down within days of the event itself, described quite a different alien, with different and less menacing eyes. The wraparound eyes surfaced much later, in a hypnosis session involving her husband on February 22, 1964—as it happens, twelve days after the broadcast of an episode featuring just such wraparound eyes on the science-fiction television show, *The Outer Limits*. It thus seems highly probable that these large and deep orbs, soon to become icons of narrative after narrative of alien abduction, were first created as fiction and only then obligingly if unknowingly confabulated into "reality" by Barney Hill and his hypnotist.*

Close Encounters of the Third Kind similarly disseminated an image of little, big-headed, frail-bodied, strange-eyed men, as well as the notion of alien abduction and manipulation of human thought. By the time Whitley Strieber became well-launched into his own series of memoirs, every aspiring abductee with the price of a paperback had the drill down pat.

IN THE end, despite all these various attempts to establish the "scientific" credibility of his witnesses, Mack's principal device is simply to lower the bar of credibility itself. Throughout both his books, he pushes the idea that the things they report to him happened not as we may understand "happened" but in another dimension, on a different—but no less real—level of reality. Impossible in this world, the experiencers' experiences may be possible in another.

This argument is a perversion of the perfectly sound scientific practice of specifying your environment. All sorts of physical constants, for example, are defined in terms of sea level; if you experiment in Denver, you will not get the "right" values, but you can validate your figures by indicating the altitude at which they were read. Thus, if we knew of another reality whose ground rules permitted alien abductions, Mack would be within his rights, as a scientist, to bring it into account. To his detriment, alas, he has no such reality. Although one can readily imagine one or another means by which aliens might successfully attract our attention—landing on the field at halftime during the Superbowl, for example—sadly, public relations seems to be an undeveloped art on Zeta Reticuli.

* I owe this reconstruction to an article by Martin Kottmeyer in the September 1994 *Skeptical Inquirer*.

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Which is to say that, when it comes right down to it, Mack can offer no persuasive evidence against the proposition that his experiencers are either deluded or fraudulent. And if he, a licensed physician, steadfastly refuses to help them shed their delusions or their mendacity, that is because his modal view of them is that they *have* been through the various extraordinary and improbable experiences they claim, and that alien creatures regularly do visit earth, abduct human beings, impregnate them, harvest their fetuses, and implant foreign objects in their bodies.

It needs to be appreciated that most of these experiencers do not possess fully developed memories of abduction *before* they come to Mack. Those memories emerge in the course of so-called regressions, or hypnosis sessions, as well as through less dramatic techniques of relaxation. Although Mack maintains that he takes great care not to implant memories where there are none, we have seen how easy it is for some people to conflate memories of different orders of experience, personal and vicarious, not to speak of the vast reservoirs of circumstantial detail ready at hand through the subconscious memory of literary works and movies. No matter how superficially methodical Mack may be, his own status as a believer in the reality of alien abduction cannot but be a potent influence on his clients. In short, he is an enabler.

Passport to the Cosmos is rife with the jargon of New Age "spirituality." Mack has high praise for something called Holotropic Breathwork, a system for inducing "no-ordinary" states of consciousness through controlled breathing and listening to music, and he cites approvingly a quintessentially New Age institution that teaches Brennan Health Science, also known as Hands of Light. There is, one supposes, nothing in principle to stop a New Age physician from taking unhappy people and sending them home with grandiose delusions, especially if they feel less unhappy as a result. Still, one wonders whether the American Psychiatric Association—even in its present, degraded condition—would agree. After all, adopting the rule that the doctor's is the perspective that needs to be altered can lead to putting the lunatics in charge not merely of the asylum but of the psychiatrists, too.

All of which is why, ultimately, John E. Mack of the Harvard Medical School is a much more interesting and distressing phenomenon than any of his poor "fellow researchers." That he, too, shows every outward sign of sincerity is hardly a comfort.

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OBSERVATIONS

Missing Mary McCarthy

Midge Decter

OF THE making of books featuring the late critic and novelist Mary McCarthy it seems there is to be no end. In the years since her death in 1989, we have been treated to two biographies, one by Carol Gelderman (1989) and one by Carol Brightman (1992); a snippet by McCarthy herself, *Intellectual Memoirs: New York, 1936-1938* (1992), undoubtedly the beginning of something more extended; a volume of her correspondence with Hannah Arendt (*Between Friends*, 1995); and *Twenty-four Ways of Looking at Mary McCarthy: The Writer and Her Work*, edited by Eve Stwertka and Margo Viscusi (1996). And now there are two new books: *Seeing Mary Plain* by Frances Kiernan,* who was for many years the book-review editor of the *New Yorker*, and *Partisans* by David Laskin.†

From one point of view, I suppose, none of this is surprising. The author of *The Company She Keeps* (1942), *The Groves of Academe* (1952), *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (1957), *The Group* (1963), *Birds of America* (1971), and *Cannibals and Missionaries* (1979) was beautiful, famous, and very, very clever, some would say brilliant. Above all, she was a member of a literary-intellectual community that has itself in recent years become a subject of great historical interest to many people—and, it would appear from Mary's case, particularly to women.

Seeing Mary Plain is basically a lengthy collection of interviews held together by brief biographical introductions. As the format might suggest, it is a work of hagiography—with piety, you might say, oozing from every pore. And why would her old friends *not* be pious in speaking on the record? Mary was both a very imposing and a very entertaining woman and had a wide circle of acquaintance; she was ill for quite a long time; and she suffered terribly before she died. The result, however, not only makes for rather dull reading but is also quite uninformative. For if there is anyone toward whom piety is a beclouding attitude, it is Mary McCarthy.

Though she herself now and then affected to believe in the virtue of dutifulness, and came close to it in her relations with Hannah Arendt, her adopted duenna, there was basically not a drop of such feeling in Mary. What she was best and truest at was debunking anything that others applauded, all the way uphill from Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* to the works of Michelangelo. And this is not to speak of her nearly insatiable taste for the malicious barb that could be aimed at anyone who swam into her ken, including her (allegedly) nearest and dearest. Late in life, it is suggested in *Seeing Mary Plain*, she was surrounded by younger female acolytes. One trembles to imagine what she herself might have said or written about an aging lady writer caught in that particular light. All of which is to say that in Frances Kiernan's portraiture Mary is not only not seen plain—she is hardly seen at all.

AS FOR *Partisans*, whose subtitle is "Marriage, Politics, and Betrayal Among the New York Intellectuals,"

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* Norton, 890 pp., $35.00.
† Simon & Schuster, 319 pp., $26.00.

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it too focuses heavily on Mary. But it also includes only somewhat less full accounts of five other women: Elizabeth Hardwick, Hannah Arendt, and Diana Trilling, each of whom was very much a "New York intellectual," and Jean Stafford and Caroline Gordon, neither of whom was. The term "partisans" is of course meant to signify an association with *Partisan Review*, which was both the magazine and the social center of the New York school of literary intellectuals in the 40's and 50's—again with the exception of Jean Stafford, who was for a time married into the circle but whose career took a very different path, and of Caroline Gordon, who was a kind of distant kissing cousin.

David Laskin, who is also the author of a book called *A Common Life: Four Generations of American Literary Friendship and Influence*, is somewhat at sea in dealing with these women, being, as it seems, exclusively a citizen of his own time. In his introduction he remarks that they belonged to "the last generation before feminism," and for him this is a very significant statement, if not, indeed, the most significant fact about them. While he does take some account of the literary and political issues that once defined and later bedeviled the community of which they were members, what sets the real theme of this book is the problem that Betty Friedan so famously named "the Woman Question."

All these women had literary careers, some more successful than others; each of them was taken seriously by her peers; and by the end (Elizabeth Hardwick alone is still among us), each had achieved genuine renown. And yet *men*, whether as husbands, ex-husbands, or lovers, somehow remained at the center of their lives. Mary McCarthy had four husbands, Hannah Arendt two, Jean Stafford two, and Elizabeth Hardwick, Diana Trilling, and Caroline Gordon one apiece—the last-named condition, one husband, being by far the most keenly absorbing of wifely energies. All six were serious about homemaking, and, with the possible exception of Jean Stafford—whose life was full of sorrows and booze—they were enthusiastic cooks and hostesses, Mary McCarthy perhaps the greatest enthusiast among them. And most bewildering of all to poor David Laskin, when Women's Lib hit its stride, they all professed disdain for it.

Since they are his heroines, Laskin theorizes that the reason for this contempt must have been inexperience. In his view, they simply "lagged behind women who began working for the first time as a result of the war." Or, as he puts it elsewhere, "Rosie the Riveter did not beckon to the likes of Mary McCarthy, Caroline Gordon, Jean Stafford, or Elizabeth Hardwick."

Partisans is replete with such pricelessly callow nuggets of social analysis, as it is with a great deal of sheer unfiltered gossip—like Frances Kiernan, Laskin did a good deal of interviewing. Some of this gossip was retailed to him by people who were simply not in a position to know what they were talking about; some of it slips outright into the realm of fable. Nor, in his library researches, did Laskin always understand what he was reading—taking at face value, for instance, a frivolous remark of Mary's about World War II. "For most of us," she wrote one day with a characteristic flip of the pen, "the war has been a kind of ghastly entertainment." Despite all his labors, David Laskin is evidently unaware that Mary McCarthy could be the world champion of frivolousness, whether she was speaking about World War II or traveling to Hanoi—which she did in 1968—with eight pieces of luggage in tow.

IN OFFERING us the details of these women's sex lives and marriages—a subject about which none of them, with the exception of Hannah Arendt, was in the least reticent—Laskin unfailingly gets things just wrong enough to be very wrong. There is abundant detail here about Mary McCarthy's marriage to the critic Edmund Wilson, and Jean Stafford's and Elizabeth Hardwick's marriages to the poet Robert Lowell, but almost no understanding of why these women should have wanted these men in the first place or have put up with them for as long as they did.

In Laskin's eyes, for example, it would appear that Mary married Wilson on a lark—she herself pretty much describes it that way in *Intellectual Memoirs*. That Wilson was in those years a huge literary authority—a literary authority being an irresistible force in the life of a young woman writer—and that Mary's career as a writer was probably more than enough for her to stake a marriage on, are ideas that Laskin does not quite grasp. As he makes clear, Mary had a bad time of it, but then, after all, so did Wilson; and in the end she got what was promised by this marriage, though it is certain that he did not. Nor does Laskin appreciate her subsequent marriage to Bowden Broadwater, to which he devotes scant discussion. Though it ended by her dumping Broadwater, all unceremoniously and at long distance, when her fourth and final husband, James West, swept her off her feet during a trip to Europe, she had established with him a real home in New York, and he was absolutely central to that home and her life in it.

As for the two women—Jean Stafford and Elizabeth Hardwick—who married Robert Lowell and afterward paid dearly for it, once again the book fails to provide even a glimmer of understanding. Lowell is described at length as a strange and unbalanced young man who would do such things as camp out in the yard next to the Tennessee home of his mentor Allen Tate. Later we are told, rather in passing, of his having become a major poet. For the rest, we see Lowell mostly in the manic phase of his manic-depressive illness, an illness from

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which years of shock treatments and various drugs and therapies brought no surcease.

When manic, Lowell sometimes grew violent, and was capable of coming home with a strange woman to whom he had proposed marriage; as the years wore on, the mania grew. It can have been no picnic for his two wives, especially not for Elizabeth Hardwick, who unlike Jean Stafford stayed the course for many years. But if Laskin were paying proper respect to her, he might have noticed that illness, or even fame, was not all there was to Lowell, who when he climbed down from madness was extraordinarily sweet and perceptive and loving. No wonder Hardwick kept hoping for the appearance of some medicine to his distemper—until it was too late and he was off, married to someone else and living in London. (And small wonder, too, that she was later moved to cast a momentary, sisterly glance at the feminists.)

FINALLY, LASKIN turns out to be downright hostile—perhaps more hostile than he himself knows—to the political and literary attitudes of the community of "partisans." He seems to have absorbed a lot from the published reminiscences of Diana Trilling, who, although a full-fledged member of the community, also carried on intermittent and often fierce warfare against it. Though a literary critic in good standing, she seemed constantly embattled about her status, anxious lest she be thought of as "merely" Lionel Trilling's wife, and on the lookout for insult. Surely it was she who fed Laskin's own feminist inclinations with the canard that wives who were not themselves writers counted for nothing among the brutally exclusionary partisans.

To be sure, there was malice aplenty—among others, Mary McCarthy and Philip Rahv (one of *Partisan Review*'s two editors) were consummate masters of it. (Hardwick, too, was no amateur.) Beyond mean gossip, often not much more than an easy source of entertainment, there was also an underground current of genuine antagonism. Among the men, this antagonism was like a kind of steady low-level nasal drip. Among the women, it tended to come in flashes—which may be why they were better able to put it to literary use. Whatever the case, these feelings resulted not from the lack of a raised sexual consciousness but above all from the fact that, for more than two decades, the "partisans," male and female alike, were unable to escape from one another's clutches.

They were unable to escape for a very good reason: the hatred of both their political and their literary ideas within so much of the world that surrounded them. In the late 1930's and 40's, they were anti-Stalinist radicals committed to the literary and artistic avant-garde when prevailing opinion was pro-Stalinist in politics and, in artistic matters, hostile to modernism. By the 1950's they had become mild leftists and liberal anti-Communists but remained committed to a literary and artistic avant-garde that was itself on the verge of becoming less "avant" and increasingly the stuff of advertising campaigns—and thereby yet a further source of alienation. The "partisan" community would begin to come unstuck in the 60's, with several defections from among its ranks to the camp of the radical students, and would blow up even further in the 70's with the onset of neoconservatism.

In fairness to the tin-eared and uncomprehending Laskin, one has to repeat that the literary-political history of this group about which he has absorbed so little is not the real subject of his book. What he is really doing is expressing both awe and a very contemporary puzzlement that such gifted and accomplished women as Mary McCarthy, Hannah Arendt, Elizabeth Hardwick, Jean Stafford, Caroline Gordon, and even to some extent Diana Trilling should have managed to get through life without protesting against the condition of women, or venting their anger against the masculine principle, or holding "society" or "patriarchy" responsible for any of their difficulties.

"How could such a thing be possible?" is the question this book was really written to address. If it utterly fails to provide an answer, that is because the question itself arises out of a culture that surrendered without a whisper of resistance to the likes of Germaine Greer, Susan Brownmiller, and Gloria Steinem, with their doctrine of the "injustices" done to them and their sisters throughout history. In this sense, *Partisans* is not, as it bills itself, a chronicle of the past but a document right out of a stale, weary, and (it is to be hoped) waning feminist present—one that, despite all the books about Mary and the rest, has paid no real heed to her or to any of Laskin's other putative heroines.

Still, for anyone who knew them, there are small and inadvertent consolations in *Partisans*. If only poor Mary from her grave could hear that her life was never really touched by the career of Rosie the Riveter, she would undoubtedly be rolling over and over in that state of sparkling amusement that was her most attractive, and in the end her most admirable, quality.

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Music

American Opera in Progress

Terry Teachout

If you talk to any American composer under the age of fifty, chances are that he will either have just written an opera or be planning to write one soon. This has as much to do with economics as with aesthetics. Professional composers follow the musical market no less closely than the Supreme Court is said to follow the election returns, and the ongoing explosion of interest in American opera, noted in these pages last summer,* shows no signs of abating; for the first time since the 1950's, it has become possible for an American composer seriously to contemplate the prospect of writing an opera that will receive multiple productions.

Take, for instance, John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby*, premiered by New York's Metropolitan Opera last December, and William Bolcom's *A View from the Bridge*, premiered by the Lyric Opera of Chicago two months earlier. These works have much in common. Both are large-scale stage pieces by distinguished American composers of the late-modernist generation (Harbison and Bolcom were both born in 1938). Both are musical adaptations of preexisting works by famous American authors. And both are composed in straightforwardly tonal idioms that incorporate elements of American popular music.

Most interesting of all, though, is that Lyric Opera will be presenting the Met's production of *Gatsby* next season, while the Met will borrow *View* in 2002. Although the sharing of productions is now common in the opera business, it is nevertheless remarkable that the country's two biggest companies should be mounting two untested works by American composers in such a fashion. Clearly, American opera, long viewed by the directors of major houses as an ugly stepchild of the standard repertoire, has at last begun to come into its own.

But for all their similarities, *Gatsby* and *View* are also very different operas, and they take sharply dissimilar approaches—one promising, the other not—to the continuing problem of forging a viable American style. Nor do they represent anything like the full range of possibilities currently being explored by American composers and companies.

John Harbison's version of F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1925 novel was commissioned by the Met to honor the 25th anniversary of the debut of James Levine, the company's music director and this country's most successful opera conductor. Levine is not known for his commitment to American composers—insofar as his taste in modern music can be divined from the works he chooses to conduct at the Met and elsewhere, it runs to such prewar European serialists as Arnold Schoenberg and Alban Berg. Nor does the Met often produce new operas. In that light, it was no great surprise that, in honoring Levine, the company should have commissioned an essentially conservative work from a composer who in recent years has emerged as a pillar of the domestic new-music establishment.

Harbison's résumé says everything about his music. A graduate of Harvard and Princeton, and a longtime professor at the Massachusetts

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Institute of Technology, he is the academic composer par excellence. He has received a Pulitzer prize and a MacArthur fellowship, and has served as composer-in-residence with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Pittsburgh Symphony, and the Aspen, Marlboro, and Tanglewood music festivals. Yet none of his pieces has entered the working repertoire of any world-class performer or ensemble. Neither of his two previous operas, *A Winter's Tale* (1974) and *A Full Moon in March* (1979), is particularly well-known.

Harbison can hardly be accused of opportunism in choosing to turn *The Great Gatsby* into an opera; his interest in the novel goes back many years. But the same cannot be said of the Met, whose desire to commission a stage version of so familiar a book smacks, itself, of an increasingly familiar phenomenon: the practice by which major companies put together readily marketable packages whose parts have been carefully assembled with an eye to high name recognition.*

As it happens, *Gatsby* is both a great work of art and, when it comes to name recognition, a literary property of blue-chip quality. The story of how James Gatz, a poor but earnest boy from the Midwest, turned himself into Jay Gatsby, the gorgeous, gold-hatted bootlegger who rented a mansion on Long Island and there sought with dire results to reclaim the Southern belle he had loved and lost, continues to resound in our collective imagination; rarely has the American dream of self-actualization without limit been so vividly embodied, or its discontents so unsparingly probed.

Alas, however, the weak link in brand-name operas tends to be the music, and *Gatsby* is no exception. Harbison's slow-paced score is mainline modernist yard goods—mildly dissonant and determinedly tuneless save for the clever 20's pop-song pastiches that brighten the party scenes. It is tonal in the limited sense of not being atonal, but at no point does Harbison show any grasp of how the great opera composers of the past used functional tonality to create, sustain, and release dramatic tension over extended periods of time. Instead, his harmonically static music continually reaches for grand gestures without ever grasping them.

NO LESS troublesome is the composer's own libretto, a filet of Fitzgerald in which all of the novel's action and most of its famous lines ("Her voice is full of money") are collapsed into a two-act plot. Moreover, where Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* is retrospectively narrated by Nick Carraway, through whose consciousness the unfolding action is filtered, in Harbison's adaptation Nick (sung by Dwayne Croft) is a secondary character and the mysterious Jay Gatsby (Jerry Hadley) is placed at center stage throughout. This was an inevitable decision, since the closeness of first-person narration is incompatible with the large musical gestures of major-house opera (in which the orchestra functions as the "narrator"). But it also deprives the opera of much of what made its source so distinctive.

Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*, after all, is a relatively intimate, even undramatic conversation piece whose effectiveness arises in large part from the contrast between the confiding tone of Nick's elegiac voice and the inscrutability of Gatsby, who proves in the end to be all surface and self-delusion. This critical contrast is completely missing from Harbison's libretto. Indeed, he has gone so far as to give Gatsby a pair of clumsily confessional arias, in the process betraying his incomprehension of Fitzgerald's intentions: Gatsby, the great mystery man of American fiction, would never have revealed himself in that way, not even *to* himself.

Another mistake was to make Gatsby a *lirico-spinto* tenor, the quintessentially "heroic" voice type of 19th-century Italian opera, rather than a baritone (as had been widely expected). Such singers can play flawed heroes, but their voices are too bright and affirmative for the role of ambiguous anti-heroes. Jerry Hadley is, to boot, middle-aged, stocky, and unglamorous—hardly the "elegant young roughneck" of Fitzgerald's imagination—and his beefy tenor voice is badly frayed.

The remainder of the cast was excellent, with Lorraine Hunt Lieberson, the celebrated baroque-opera mezzo-soprano, making a memorable company debut in the small but showy role of Myrtle. The production was sensitively directed by Mark Lamos and designed in high art-deco style by Michael Yeargan. But even the seemingly infinite resources of the Metropolitan Opera House were insufficient to conceal the fact that Harbison has turned Fitzgerald's quicksilver masterpiece into an overlong opera that is stolidly competent and hopelessly undramatic.

LIKE *Gatsby*, the operatic version of *A View from the Bridge* is aesthetically conservative. In a way it is even more so, since William Bolcom has deliberately taken as his model the naturalistic style of opera, known as *verismo*, that was popularized by such turn-of-the-century Italian romantics as Leoncavallo, Mascagni, and Puccini. But Bolcom has also carefully thought through the problem of how to write a tradition-based opera that is dramatically alive, and with impressive results.

To begin with, he chose to set not a novel but a play, and one whose own "operatic" qualities have frequently been remarked upon. Arthur Miller's 1955 drama, which Miller adapted in collaboration with Arnold Weinstein, tells the story of Eddie Carbone (Kim Josephson), a middle-aged Italian-American longshoreman from Brooklyn who is sexually attracted to his young niece Catherine (Juliana Rambaldi). Unable to sleep with his wife Beatrice

* See my "Brand-Name Opera," COMMENTARY, November 1998.

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(Catherine Malfitano) and tortured by his illicit longing for Catherine, Eddie finds himself ostracized by his fellow immigrants.

The events that flow from this forbidden passion are the stuff of which *verismo* opera is made—there is even a climactic knife fight. Furthermore, Miller's naturalistic dialogue is plain-spoken enough to profit from the heightened emotionality that is made possible by the singing voice (as opposed to the flowery diction of a play like Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which sounded painfully overripe in André Previn's 1998 operatic version).

Having picked a subject that demands full-blooded musical gestures, Bolcom proved eminently capable of rising to the occasion. It is significant that, although of the same generation as John Harbison, he is not an "establishment" modernist. A key figure in the ragtime revival of the 60's, Bolcom has long been involved in the study and performance of American popular music—among other things, he is widely known for the popular-song recitals that he gives with his wife, the mezzo-soprano Joan Morris—and his classical compositions are couched in a polystylistic idiom that incorporates an exceptionally wide variety of musical dialects.

Not surprisingly, then, the score to *View* is flecked with such pop-flavored devices as a "doo-wop" vocal quartet and a witty version of the popular song "Paper Doll," sung in the style of a Puccini aria. But Bolcom has succeeded in bending these idioms to his own purposes, and the results do not sound like a Broadway show with added dissonance but a brusquely laconic modernist score in which the popular music of the 50's is refracted to powerful effect. For this reason and others, *View* will surely be taken up by other companies here and abroad, and in time might even become a permanent part of the international operatic repertoire.

FOR ALL its virtues, however, no one would call *A View from the Bridge* theatrically innovative. Miller's dramaturgy is conventional—*View* is as much a "well-made" opera as *Tosca* or *Pagliacci*—and, though Bolcom has succeeded in creating a recognizably American equivalent of *verismo*, he breaks no new musical ground. Rather, *View* represents a continuation of the naturalistic American-opera tradition originated in the 40's and 50's by such composers as Gian Carlo Menotti and Carlisle Floyd.

In the century to come, one suspects, a truly indigenous American-opera style will emerge not from that tradition but from elsewhere. Among the possibilities currently on display, one is to be seen in the work of younger composers seeking self-consciously to re-create the idiom of musical comedy in the sophisticated image of Stephen Sondheim, the only Broadway songwriter to have consistently produced important new musicals throughout the past quarter-century. Such composers include Michael John LaChiusa, whose *Marie Christine* was produced late last year by Lincoln Center Theater even as *Gatsby* was opening at the Met, and Adam Guettel, whose *Floyd Collins*, first seen off Broadway in 1996, has since been produced by regional theater companies across the U.S.

Though billed as "a new musical," *Marie Christine*, which featured the phenomenally gifted Audra McDonald in the title role, has much in common with such *opéra-comique* works as Bizet's *Carmen* or a *Singspiel* like Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, both of which include spoken dialogue and song-like arias. Roughly two-thirds of the show is sung, and much of the dialogue is orchestrally accompanied; of the three dozen musical numbers, only one is a free-standing song that ends with a break for applause. The harmonic language is often quite dissonant, at least by the comparatively bland standards of contemporary popular music. And LaChiusa's own libretto, in which the Greek myth of Medea is transplanted to turn-of-the-century New Orleans and Chicago, is frankly tragic, with an ending far starker than anything previously attempted in a Broadway musical.

Interestingly, LaChiusa has insisted in print that *Marie Christine* is not an opera—an opinion echoed by several critics. (The most thoughtful of them, Anthony Tommasini of the *New York Times*, dismissed it as "neither an opera nor a musical" but "a clunky hybrid.") And there are indeed good reasons for calling it a musical. For one thing, the cast and orchestra are electronically amplified; for another, the score's rhythmic language is almost entirely pop-based. But if *Marie Christine* is a musical, it is one that aspires, in my opinion successfully, to the expressive weight of opera—albeit a vernacular American opera employing singers who eschew the "legitimate" vocal techniques necessary in order to be heard over a full orchestra in a large house without benefit of amplification.

This last is an important qualification. Few American operas have achieved the double aim of being sufficiently grand in scale to "work" in a large house and sufficiently accessible in musical style to please mass audiences; from this perspective, it is by no means clear that the vernacular-opera style of LaChiusa, or of Adam Guettel in *Floyd Collins*, will feed into the mainstream of American opera. But it is worth noting that at least one serious company, Houston Grand Opera, is currently planning to revive *Floyd Collins*—and that another, Chicago's Lyric Opera, recently announced that it would produce Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd* in 2002, with the great Welsh bass-baritone Bryn Terfel in the title role. As more classical singers like Terfel, McDonald, Anne Sofie von Otter, Frederica von Stade, and Dawn Upshaw begin to devote substantial parts of their careers to the perfor-

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mance of American popular music, it will become increasingly feasible for opera companies to consider adding such works to their repertoires.

Ultimately, though, it is composers—not singers, or conductors, or even general managers—who will set the course of American opera in the 21st century. And it may well be that the best of those composers have yet to be heard from.

Prior to World War II, it was widely felt that British work was dead beyond hope of revival; the last opera by an English-born composer to enter the standard repertoire had been Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, composed in 1689. But then, in 1945, Benjamin Britten, the greatest English composer of the 20th century, decided to devote the bulk of his energies to opera. His *Peter Grimes* was an immediate worldwide success. By the time of his death in 1976, Britten had turned out another half-dozen operas of the first rank; organized the English Opera Group, specifically devoted to the production of chamber-sized operas; and inspired countless other English composers to write for the stage.

To date, American opera has produced one masterpiece, George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (1935), and a number of striking works that have met with varying degrees of public acceptance, among them Samuel Barber's *Vanessa* (1958); Aaron Copland's *The Tender Land* (1954); Carlisle Floyd's *Of Mice and Men* (1970); Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Medium* (1946) and *The Consul* (1950); Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934) and *The Mother of Us All* (1947); and, more recently, William Bolcom's *A View from the Bridge* and Lowell Liebermann's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. What we have *not* produced is an American Britten, sufficiently gifted and charismatic to serve as a style-setting bellwether for an entire generation of younger opera composers.

The newly resurgent appeal of the musical genre Copland wryly called *la forme fatale* is without question a crucial development in the history of American music. Where it will lead is another matter, and an unpredictable one. But one thing is likely: American opera—be it classical or vernacular or some as-yet-unknown hybrid—will not come into its long-delayed maturity until a characteristically American genius leads the way.

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Books in Review

On K Street

The Paradox of American Democracy: Elites, Special Interests, and the Betrayal of the Public Trust
by John B. Judis
Pantheon. 320 pp. $26.00

Reviewed by
Chester E. Finn, Jr.

HAVE SPECIAL interests conquered American politics and government? Several leading presidential candidates insist that they have—and seek political advantage from the charge that their rivals are in the grip of contributors and lobbyists. Innumerable schemes for "campaign-finance reform" assume that John Q. Public has been bloodied by the clawing of fat cats—and that tighter government regulation is the only way to overcome the resultant political apathy and voter ennui. As for the media, they seem to take the accuracy of this charge for granted.

There is, of course, something to it. Anyone who observed Congress earmarking the budget surplus for fiscal year 2000 saw plenty of pork being grilled. And anyone who follows the doings of state legislatures, county councils, and school boards cannot help noticing that many decisions are made (or avoided) because of pressure from sundry interest groups.

The picture, however, is not so simple. When does a worthy cause become a vested interest? When does a guardian of one's own welfare turn into a "lobbyist"? And are lobbyists *per se* really a bad thing? After all, ours is a large and complex polity in which nobody can possibly represent himself in every forum or personally monitor the positions and votes of every elected official. By closely tracking affairs of state on behalf of our interests and enthusiasms, effective lobbyists, it might be argued, enable the rest of us to devote our energies to earning a living, raising a family, mowing the lawn, reading magazines, and making whoopee.

A thoughtful book seeking balance in such matters would be a welcome, if not particularly electrifying, contribution to public enlightenment. A one-sided screed, however, while apt to raise the voltage, can only subtract from our understanding. That, unfortunately, is what John Judis has produced. An often perspicacious journalist who has moved some distance from his past affiliations—now a senior editor at the *New Republic*, he was once an activist in Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and an editor of the radical publication *Socialist Revolution*—he appears, to judge by this disappointing book, to be returning to his roots.

THE THESIS Judis adumbrates in *The Paradox of American Democracy* is that our governmental institutions are gravely undermined and our politics besmirched by a single genre of special interest: "K Street." That is his code phrase for the Washington-based representatives of major corporations and their sundry organizations. Bent on securing wealth for themselves and their shareholders, they sweep the

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public interest before them like leaves in a typhoon.

Things, in Judis's telling, were not always thus. In the 1960's, American politics witnessed a kind of "populist pluralism"—a decade of "true reform" akin to the Progressive era and the New Deal. Thanks to a coalition encompassing everyone from trade unionists to feminists, we succeeded for a time in widening "the scope of politics . . . to include consumer protection, environmental regulation, and the guarantee of sexual and racial equality."

By the 1970's, however, trouble descended in the form of a conservative "business counteroffensive" that, although riven by inner tensions of its own, established durable barriers to the spirit of reform. In chapters with titles like "The Frustration of Reform" and "Sleepwalking Toward the Millennium," Judis regales us with tales of influence-peddling and other forms of covert and overt private intervention whose cumulative effect has been to subvert the workings of our democracy.

What to do? The rot, having been caused by corporate might, can only be eradicated by government. To that end, contends Judis, echoing the Progressive-era founder of the *New Republic* Herbert Croly, we need strong, multifaceted federal institutions that set rules, impose limits, and interpolate themselves into nearly every sphere of society. Only thus will we ensure that the "betrayal of public trust" is brought to an end.

Judis's diagnosis of the American condition and his remedy for it are clear enough, and their echoes can be heard in the stump speeches of Al Gore, Bill Bradley, and John McCain. Unfortunately, his analysis is at least as superficial as theirs, if also much more extreme.

Without question, business is a powerful force in American politics. But it is by no means the only huge, policy-blocking concentration of power and self-interest in the land. In the field of education, for instance, it is not corporate America that keeps poor children trapped in rotten urban schools; it is, rather, mainly the teacher unions (the largest of which is headquartered not on K but on M Street in Washington), school-board associations, and myriad other groups that live off tax dollars.

This other face of special interests is visible in many spheres of our public life, yet Judis is all but oblivious to it. At the same time, there is still another concentration of interests for which he has nothing but praise—which, indeed, he refuses to recognize as interests at all: these are the various "disinterested elites," as he calls them, that in his judgment serve as balance wheels in our political machinery. He associates

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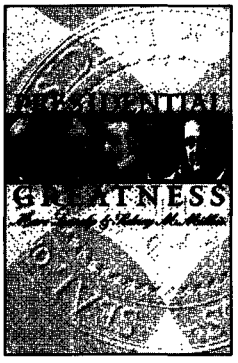

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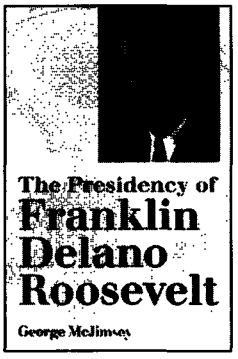

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these elites with such organizations as the Council on Foreign Relations in the 1950's, the Brookings Institution of the 1960's, and the Ford Foundation in the 70's.

In Judis's estimation, all these places were fonts of wise and dispassionate public-policy counsel until they too were captured by corporate interests in the Reagan years. Complicit in that takeover, he adds darkly, were the media, which in the 1980's began to treat the ideas generated in right-wing organizations like the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Heritage Foundation "with the same respect" as those issuing from politically "disinterested" sources like the Brookings Institution, the National Bureau of Economic Research, and university economics departments. In one of this book's more astounding passages, Judis complains that the press

> accepted the canard that different views simply reflected different ideologies and that to be fair, both Left and Right, liberal and conservative, had to be represented. Once this concession was made, the conservatives triumphed, because in the late 1970's and 1980's they had far more money than their rivals with which to broadcast, publish, and promote their opinions.

FOR JOHN Judis, in short, there is only one kind of special interest in America—the kind represented by corporations and their lackeys in conservative think tanks. Other voices in the national debate, i.e., the leftist kind, are really "disinterested," having only the greater good of the nation at heart. From this premise flow ineluctably his balmy belief that the Brookings Institution's experts are somehow more "disinterested" than those of AEI, his notion that it is the job of the press to adjudicate between Left and Right by favoring the former and delegitimizing the latter (it will surely come as news to many journalists that they have been remiss in their performance of this particular duty), and his delusion that conservatives have "triumphed." On this last point, one need only consider the record of how the Ford Foundation has dispensed its largesse over the past 25 years, funding one cutting-edge countercultural project after another, to assess Judis's bizarre claim that that giant institution has been "emasculated" by capitalists.

But the most alarming aspect of Judis's book is not its analysis but its prescription: that the way to free American politics from the grip of special interests is to return to the antics of the 60's. A true child of that era, Judis cherishes "popular movements" rooted in a "mobilized base outside of Washington" and defined by "their ability to disrupt the normal patterns of life—whether through strikes, demonstrations, marches, or boycotts." He positively rhapsodizes over the tactics employed by his own erstwhile political movement, SDS (including its violent "Weatherman" faction), along with summer riots in major cities, the Black Panthers, and other bygone glories.

True, he admits, some of the revolutionaries of the late 60's eventually went too far. But more than the chaos, destruction, and death for which they were responsible, what Judis mainly regrets is the conservative reaction they triggered—the elections of Ronald Reagan as governor of California in 1967 and Richard Nixon as President in 1968. Defending the movements of the 1960's, including their "radical wing," he writes glowingly that they

> helped force the Nixon administration to withdraw from Vietnam and . . . provoked Congress and the administration into pouring money into cities and into adopting a strategy of affirmative action in hiring and federal contracts. During Nixon's first term, spending on Johnson's Great Society programs and on welfare and food stamps dramatically increased, while spending on the military went down.

A convincing argument—at least to anyone who applauds the bitter racial polarization fostered by affirmative action, the establishment of an all-but-ineradicable culture of dependency and an all-but-permanent underclass thanks to Great Society programs, and the abandonment of South Vietnam to Communism.

In the end, this flimsy attempt to maintain that American democracy has been undone by corporate greed tells us far less about the genuinely important subject of interest groups and how to regulate them than it does about certain characteristic intellectual habits that, having somehow survived the destruction they helped to wreak, evidently stand ready to try all over again.

The Horror

Disgrace
by J.M. Coetzee
Viking. 220 pp. $23.95

Reviewed by
Carol Iannone

IN *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), Alan Paton's lyrical novel of South Africa, a black Anglican priest, patient but acutely sensitive to the injustice of apartheid, remarks about his country's dominant white minority: "I have one great fear in my heart, that one day when they turn to loving they will find we are turned to hating." J. M. Coetzee's eighth novel, *Disgrace*, his first about his native South Africa after its transition to black-majority rule, constitutes a direct and rather ominous meditation on that fear. *Disgrace* won the Booker Prize in 1999, making

CAROL IANNONE *writes on cultural and literary matters for* COMMENTARY *and other periodicals.*

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Coetzee the only author to win twice, the first time having been for *Life and Times of Michael K.* in 1983.

Fifty-two-year-old David Lurie teaches, or, as he puts it, "earns his living," at Cape Technical University, formerly Cape Town University College. (The change of name itself is meant to suggest how dismally the life of the mind is faring in South Africa of late.) Both the classics and modern-language departments having been shut down in a process called "rationalization," Lurie now teaches "communications," a field he finds inherently "preposterous," plus one literature course each year that fails to excite his "[p]ost-Christian, posthistorical, postliterate" students.

When we first encounter him, Lurie is twice divorced and content with a weekly visit to a prostitute, a habit made untenable when he accidentally runs into her with her young children in tow. He then begins an affair on uncertain terms with Melanie Isaacs, one of his students. (Their names notwithstanding, these characters are not explicitly identified as Jewish, though the unspoken fact of their Jewishness clearly has something to do with Coetzee's larger symbolic purposes.) She is not unwilling, but neither does she fully consent; as for him, although he feels a hope that "there might, despite all, be a future" for the two of them, he mishandles things; Melanie becomes confused and rattled, and a sexual-harassment complaint is soon filed.

In the midst of Rape Awareness Week, Lurie must undergo the procedure his university has set out for such cases. The panel assigned to hear his case, which seems quite pointedly not to include any "white males," insists not only on an admission of guilt—this Lurie readily gives—but on "confession, repentance, abasement." But Lurie cannot bring himself to renounce an affair that has engaged his passion and affections, and in any event he will not concede to his inquisitors the right to think his private thoughts:

> I appeared before an officially constituted tribunal, before a branch of the law. Before that secular tribunal I pleaded guilty, a secular plea. . . . Repentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse.

It appears, then, that we are finally being given something to admire in this dour, self-centered figure. But the next part of the novel thoroughly undermines any such expectation, just as it erases the crucial distinction Lurie has himself drawn between the spheres of public and private accountability. Instead, the two gradually blur into the background of South Africa's changed political and social landscape, in which the rights of man have apparently lost any semblance of validity.

Dismissed from his teaching position for his stubborn stand, Lurie goes to his daughter's place in the country to puzzle out his life. Lucy is an ex-hippie lesbian, living at the moment in contented celibacy and making ends meet by caring for dogs and raising flowers—a scaled-down, close-to-the-earth, nonintellectual existence that contrasts with what has been her father's appetite for sensual satisfaction and worldly accomplishment. Lurie now busies himself helping out at a local animal clinic run by one of Lucy's married friends. There he slowly overcomes his cynical detachment, develops an affection for the many unwanted dogs that must be put down, and conducts a brief affair with the unattractive owner of the clinic in an episode that constitutes a sort of penance for his previous sexual arrogance.

But just as Lurie is adjusting to his reduced circumstances, and living through his "disgrace," much greater humiliations are in store. The ever-present dread of crime in the new South Africa becomes a horrible reality when three black intruders gain entry to the Lurie property, ransack the house, shoot the dogs, set David afire, and rape Lucy,

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who later learns that she has become pregnant as a result.

It is soon established that Lucy's former assistant, a black man by the name of Petrus who is now, post-apartheid, her co-proprietor, probably knew the attack was coming and managed to absent himself on the day it occurred. Lurie, confronting him, is met with impassivity, insensibility, stonewalling. "In the old days one could have had it out with Petrus," Lurie thinks. But now, "It is a new world they live in, he and Lucy and Petrus. Petrus knows it, and he knows it, and Petrus knows that he knows it."

Unlike her father, however, Lucy has been coming to terms with the new situation; she is prepared to accept the child growing within her, and she also recognizes that Petrus cannot and will not be brought to account. Invoking a phrase indelibly associated with an earlier regime of white supremacy, she spits out: "He is not some hired laborer whom I can sack because in my opinion he is mixed up with the wrong people. That's all gone, gone with the wind."

Perhaps, Lucy tells her father, the rapists have even marked her out as their own property, and will return to claim her—and she wonders, shockingly, "if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on. . . . They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors." When Petrus offers to protect her and the child if she will become part of his extended household, in effect giving over her land and agreeing in name to being his third "wife," Lucy accepts, again shockingly, insisting only on the privacy of her own home.

Lurie protests all the way, calling on every principle of justice and ethics and individual integrity. His fatherly love and protectiveness aroused, he begs her to leave, to prosecute, to renounce, to repudiate, to refuse. But to Lucy these are all "abstractions," without meaning in the circumstances she feels she must somehow manage herself. And so, gradually, he, too, comes to accept the new arrangements, which begin to look like a disturbingly desolating allegory of the white man's fate in the new South Africa.

THIS IS a dry, hard novel, not as affecting or as imaginatively fashioned as Coetzee's other Booker winner, *Life and Times of Michael K.* The characters are so flatly presented that we cannot fully enter into their mental worlds, and the prose is so sparse as to verge on the lazy. (Thus, Melanie's body is summed up as "clear, simple." After the crime, Lurie can only reflect that "His pleasure in living has been snuffed out." And so on.) But at the same time, *Disgrace* is a gripping read, paced, shaped, and developed in a way that locks us into the narrative, and threaded with recurring images, like that of fire, which slowly build to an unbearable climax.

In fact, the airless, ungenerous voice that pervades these pages is clearly the result of a conscious authorial decision. As Lurie himself remarks, "English is an unfit medium for the truth of [today's] South Africa. . . . Like a dinosaur expiring and settling in the mud, the language has stiffened." Coetzee's subtext seems to be nothing less than the extinction of Western man and the Western sense of self as every pole of meaning that once constituted Lurie's being is slowly, inexorably, deconstructed in the reality of the new South Africa.

In this sense, *Disgrace* is vaguely reminiscent of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, except that where Conrad's Kurtz kicks over the traces of civilization and is destroyed in the process, Lurie is "reinscribed," as the academic term has it nowadays, into a new postcolonial arrangement, becoming a "figure on the margins of history." In accepting this new position, moreover, Lurie undergoes every bit of the reeducation that he once stoutly opposed when standing before the sexual-harassment tribunal. His edges wear off, his hardness melts along with his certainties. His sexuality flickers out as he begins to question the terms on which he used to see male/female relatedness; even the rape, which will at least give him a grandchild, comes to seem morally preferable to his own previous barren use of women. Renting a stuffy room with a lumpy mattress, he devotes himself to the humane elimination of dogs (an activity he refers to in German as *lösung*, "solution," a kind of holocaust), whom he has come to see as fellow beings with souls.

As Lurie surrenders the claims of his manhood and his masculine prerogatives, bound up as they are with such outmoded concepts as principle, judgment, and law, Lucy asserts the superior and countervailing "female" virtues of specificity, immediacy, acceptance, tolerance, and adaptability. Her proposed new position in Petrus's establishment, however "humiliating," is nevertheless welcomed by her as "a good point to start from again. . . . With nothing. . . . No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity."

"Like a dog," her father comments. "Yes, like a dog," she assents.

DOES COETZEE mean to endorse these horrifying new arrangements, or to accept them as inevitable? Is he projecting a chastening parable of love and forgiveness? Being realistic about post-apartheid circumstances? Predicting the doom of South Africa? Detailing the degradation of the white race? Insulting blacks as beneath the level of civilization? So artfully (or evasively) are all of these possibilities held in balance in *Disgrace* that reviewers have tied themselves in knots trying to discern its moral center. Unlike in Conrad, there is no Marlowe in this book to preserve the narrative framework and reassert, however tenuously, the ideals that have been corrupted. All we are left with at the end is the picture of Lucy, contented, close to the land, unmodern, and Lurie in a deepening state of resig-

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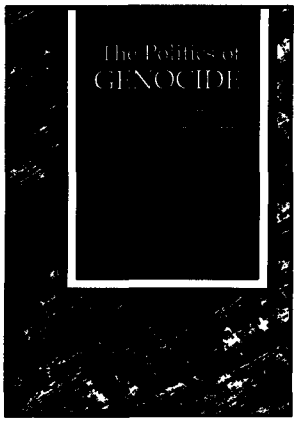

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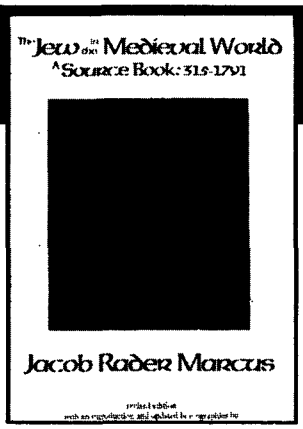

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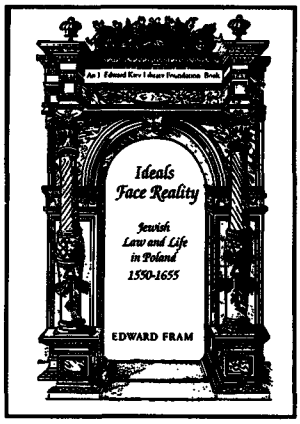

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nation, almost beyond thought or speech, cradling a doomed dog "like a lamb"—a wounded Christ figure in a scaled-down narrative of renunciation and redemption.

What if, when whites are turned to loving, blacks will have turned to hating? This (to repeat) was the terrible fear voiced by Alan Paton in *Cry, the Beloved Country*, a novel similarly centered in an incident of black-on-white violence but one in which justice and mercy triumph together. The even more terrible response given by Coetzee is that when that fateful moment arrives, any independent sense of reality will have been so completely extinguished that there will be no one to tell the difference between love and hate, justice and mercy, right and wrong. In this, surely, he is mistaken; but he comes searingly close to making us believe it is so.

Orientalism and Its Discontents

The Jewish Discovery of Islam: Studies in Honor of Bernard Lewis
Edited by Martin Kramer
Syracuse. 311 pp. $24.95

Reviewed by
Daniel Pipes

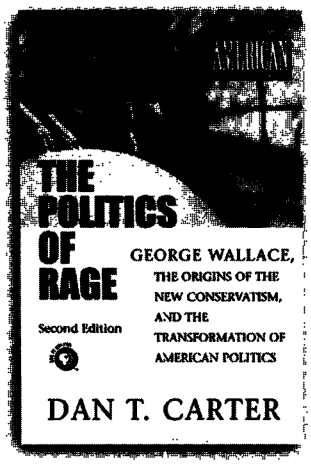
A FIERCE intellectual debate broke out in October 1976 when Edward Said, the Palestinian-born Parr Professor of English at Columbia University and a partisan of Michel Foucault and other trendy French postmodernists, wrote an essay for the *New York Times Book Review* arguing that Western scholars of the Middle East represented "an unbroken tradition in European thought of profound hostility, even hatred, toward Islam." In his diatribe, Said singled out Bernard Lewis, then the Cleveland E. Dodge Professor of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton, as the de-facto leader of this nefarious school of "Orientalism." Hardly one to shrink from a challenge, Lewis, one of our age's most eminent scholars of Islam, responded by defending vigorously the moral integrity and intellectual successes of the Orientalist tradition, that unique effort by members of one civilization to comprehend and appreciate another.

A witness to this debate might have expected Lewis's colleagues in the field to stand by him, not just because he was defending their work but because Said, for his part, clearly lacked the academic credentials that specialists of any kind usually demand of one who opines on their subject. But they did not; to the contrary, Middle East specialists overwhelmingly accepted Said's critique, and even expanded on it. Whole new subfields were developed to flesh out his arguments (for example, by applying them to gender, something Said barely mentioned); the discipline of Middle East studies became markedly inhospitable to "outsiders" (that is, outsiders to the Arab point of view); and Orientalism acquired a meaning so intensely pejorative that "neo-Orientalist" is today the worst insult one can hurl at a scholar in the field.

Still, the battle is not entirely over. Martin Kramer, a highly talented former student of Lewis's who now heads the Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University, continues the not-entirely-lonely effort to preserve and extend several centuries' worth of Western scholarship. In *The Jewish Discovery of Islam*, a book dedicated to his teacher, Kramer has brought together a collection of nine essays

DANIEL PIPES *is director of the Middle East Forum and the author of, among other works,* The Hidden Hand: Middle East Fears of Conspiracy.

THE POLITICS OF RAGE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by Middle East scholars to which he has added his own insightful introduction, all focusing on one central aspect of this tradition.

In helping to develop 19th-century European attitudes toward the Middle East, Jewish scholars, Bernard Lewis once pointed out, brought a very different sensibility to bear from that of their Christian counterparts. Unaffected by "nostalgia for the Crusades," and untouched by the bitterly hostile feelings toward Islam and Muslims that prevailed in Europe, Jews, in Lewis's words, played "a key role in the development of an objective, nonpolemical, and positive evaluation of Islamic civilization." More broadly, they were "among the first who attempted to present Islam to European readers as Muslims themselves see it and to stress, to recognize, and indeed sometimes to romanticize the merits and achievements of Muslim civilization."

Martin Kramer quotes these words in his introduction as he offers his own survey of illustrious Jewish figures—scholars and non-scholars alike—who had a major impact on Europe's perception of Islam. Again and again he is able to point up the dramatic contrast between them and the often crabbed, racially charged, and theologically hostile attitude toward Islam taken by many Christians. Seen from today's vantage point, indeed, when Muslim-Jewish relations are so often tense and even violent, the almost joyously positive tenor of this older Jewish encounter seems nothing short of astonishing.

Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81), for example, later to become prime minister of Great Britain, once thought of volunteering for the Ottoman army. Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921), perhaps Europe's single most influential student of the Middle East, went so far as to pray as a Muslim in Cairo, recounting that "never in my life was I more devout, more truly devout." Some actually converted: Muhammad Asad, *né* Leopold Weiss of Lvov and Vienna (1900-92), advised the Saudi king and served as Pakistan's ambassador to the United Nations before settling down to publish an influential English-language translation of the Qur'an.

The facts established by Kramer and his contributors have a number of implications. For one thing, as Jacob Lassner writes here, by presenting Islam more objectively, not to say empathetically, Jewish scholars turned the whole field of comparative religion "from religious apologetics . . . into a respected discipline." And this empathetic approach is the one that prevailed, making a mockery of Said's grand theory of Orientalist hostility to Islam. One Arab scholar goes so far as to credit Goldziher with having created "a kind of orthodoxy which has retained its power until our own time." By contrast, the more "Christian" approach, which did indeed see Islam as a rival and regard Middle Eastern culture as inferior, and on which Said focused to the utter neglect of the German-Jewish school, has long been not just defunct but despised and repudiated.

Ordinary Muslims now living in the West also owe much to the Jewish scholars. As Martin Kramer puts it, "the respect for Islam which Jews had done so much to disseminate not only survived in Europe, but served as the basis for Europe's tolerance of Muslim minorities" after World War II. And he goes on to make the same point in symbolic terms: "The mosque-like synagogues erected by Jewish communities in the 19th century prepared Europe to accept the real mosques which Muslim communities erected across the continent in the 20th."

But there are also a number of unpleasant ironies lurking in this tale. One hope of the early Jewish scholars of Islam was to generate sympathy for Jews as well as Muslims. As Kramer writes in his introduction, a corollary of their celebrations of me-

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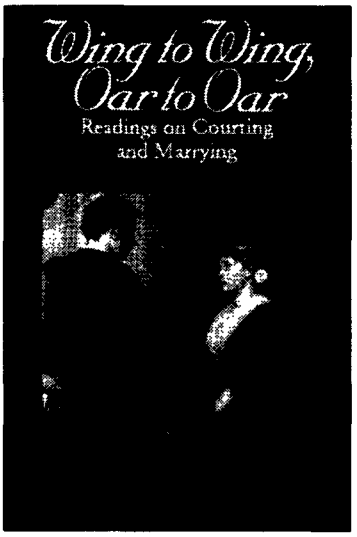

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dieval Islamic civilization—a civilization in which Jews had played no small role—was the implicit suggestion that, were contemporary Jews allowed to participate fully in European society, they would enhance it no less than they had enhanced Baghdad or Cordova, peaks of human achievement worthy of anyone's admiration. But even as they helped lay the groundwork for tolerance of Muslims and respect for Islam, these "pro-Islamic Jews" (the term is Bernard Lewis's) failed when it came to improving attitudes toward their own people. This can be seen still today, when the ideology associated with Western multiculturalism and third-worldism—two ostensibly outward-looking movements whose lineage can be traced in part to the work of the pro-Islamic Jews—remains inimical to Israel and Jews alike.

Muslims themselves have played a critical role in this process. Having adopted the romantic conceptions propagated by Jewish scholars, and having incorporated them into the Islamic self-image, they then turned them into weapons against Zionism and Jews. As Lewis has written, the myth of a time when Jews enjoyed equal rights with Muslims "was invented by Jews in 19th-century Europe as a reproach to Christians—and taken up by Muslims in our own time as a reproach to Jews," particularly the Jews in the state of Israel who have declined to assume their "rightful"—i.e., subordinate—place in the Islamic Middle East. It is an old story, this story of good will rewarded with enmity, but seldom has it been illuminated with such bitter clarity.

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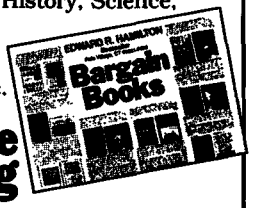

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A Prairie Home Companion

Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen: Reflections at Sixty and Beyond
by Larry McMurtry
Simon & Schuster. 204 pp. $21.00

Reviewed by
Christopher Caldwell

OVER THE last four decades, the Texas writer Larry McMurtry, now 63, has published two dozen novels. Many of the better ones—*The Last Picture Show*, *Terms of Endearment*, *Texasville*—have been turned into movies and television series, and so it is hardly surprising that he has also successfully turned his hand to screenplays, in addition to keeping up a prolific career as a journalist. On top of all this, he is one of North America's major antiquarian booksellers, most recently opening a complex in Archer City, Texas, housing 250,000 used books.

CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL *is senior writer at the* Weekly Standard.

It was while sitting at a Dairy Queen restaurant in Archer City, McMurtry tells us, that he first read "The Storyteller," an essay on the conditions that make literature possible by the German critic-philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892-1940). Since then he has read everything of Benjamin's that is available in English, though with mild irritation. For one thing, he finds it hard to share Benjamin's own disappointment at his failure to bundle his insights into big, coherent works. But he is also puzzled, specifically, by Benjamin's belief that the telling and passing-on of good stories "presupposes a certain human and cultural density." By this reckoning, since his upbringing in northern Texas offered no cultural density at all, Larry McMurtry the novelist should not exist. In the three loosely linked essays of this book, he tries to figure out why, in fact, he does.

McMurtry is at pains to underline that he comes not from the small-town, Dixie part of Texas—"a place that, spiritually, was still devastated by its defeat in the Civil War"—but from the desolate Great Plains. He grew up in Archer County, on the "shore of a sea of grass," a place where there were neither European coffeehouses nor even Southern memories and Southern courthouse steps, but only the solitary profession of cowboying. And cowboying, McMurtry shows, presents certain problems as a literary heritage.

For one thing, there were not enough people around where he grew up to create a bearable society for *non*-cowboys. For another thing, cowboying itself has long been essentially a myth, if not a fraud. Open-range cowboying lasted for only a couple of decades after the Civil War, and it was never profitable. (The Hereford and Angus cattle with which the early barons populated the prairie were "lazy grazers," bred for lush English pastures.) As for today's cowboys, they offer a shabby parody of 19th-century life that is a mix of fashion,

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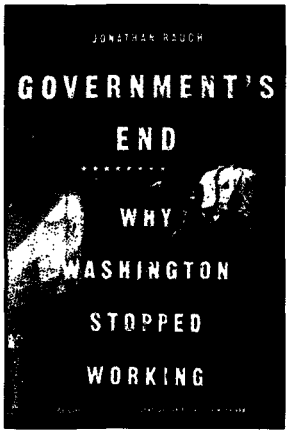

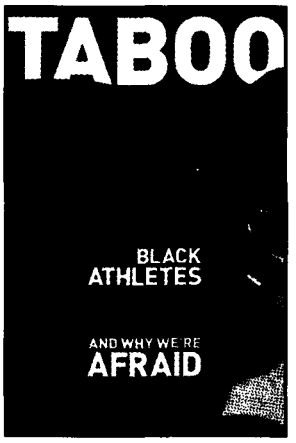

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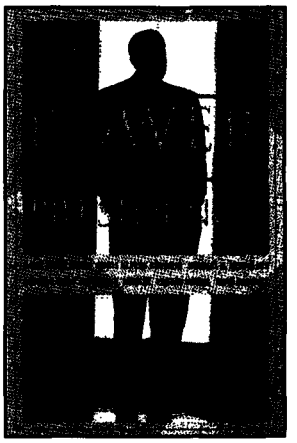

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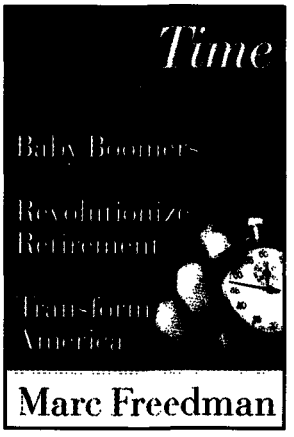

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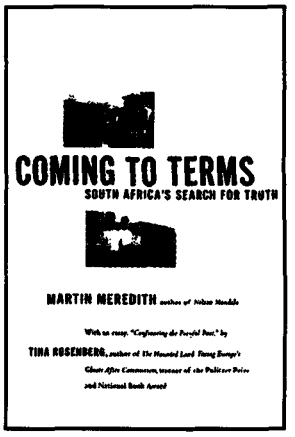

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commercialism, and debt. Most of them, McMurtry says, "live in suburban hells."

And yet, since McMurtry is plainly a novelist of major importance, just as plainly he must have come across the requisite "cultural density" somewhere. Oddly enough, the fallacy in Benjamin's prescription turns out to lie in its severe underestimation of the power of *reading* to create that density all by itself, apart from any circle of like-minded literary types. In early boyhood, a cousin bequeathed to McMurtry the first nineteen books he had ever seen. The Modern Library backlist, in those days printed inside the dust jacket of each volume, "was to me a kind of Aladdin's cave, only I didn't know what the password was." Soon he began to "read [his] way toward Europe" with the help of those he calls the "great readers" (Coleridge, George Saintsbury, and Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve).

Indeed, it is hard to think of a modern writer quite so romantically in love with books as Larry McMurtry. "If I select a given year," he asserts, "a fairly remote year—maybe 1954—I remember several people with some clarity, but I remember the three or four books I bought that year with extreme clarity." For him, "the essential privacy of the act of reading was . . . always part of its force." Books were a secession or, better, an emigration to a country where he felt at home. Without television to fill his head, bored on his windswept prairie—"Who is bored, in Western society, in quite that way today?" he asks—he moved to the place where stories got told. In a funny way, his unpromising Plains upbringing may thus have aided rather than impeded his literary ambitions.

FOR ALL the interest of such ruminations, it is sad to report that this is, in the end, a desultory book, at times a slack one, whose arguments must be pieced together out of premises thrown out at random. Its strongest passages are those in which McMurtry the novelist is most clearly at work: in descriptions of the sour, silent, prairie folk, or in the bleak but gripping narrative of his open-heart surgery in the early 1990's—an operation that from the medical perspective was a total success but that left him without the appetite or attention span to read and therefore without "a sense of who I was." Unfortunately, when critical distinctions are necessary,

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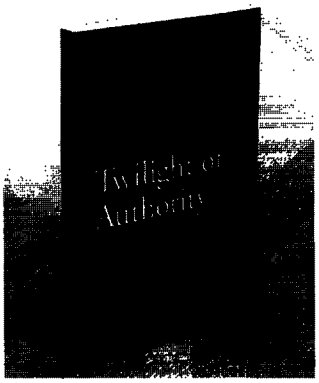
TWILIGHT OF AUTHORITY

By Robert Nisbet
Foreword by Robert G. Perrin



We had thought, or our forefathers had, that modern liberal democracy would be spared the kind of erosion and decay that both Plato and Aristotle declared endemic in all forms of state. Now we are not so sure." So wrote Robert Nisbet in the first edition of ***Twilight of Authority***, published by Oxford University Press in 1975, shortly after the resignation of President Richard Nixon revealed what Nisbet called "only the most extreme and corrupt manifestation of a democratic royalism that has roots in several preceding administrations." Nisbet argues that the political community in the West has broken down after two centuries of ascendancy. He believes that the West has entered "a twilight age" that will be characterized by political and cultural crises similar to those that preceded the fall of Rome. He foresees the displacement of traditional, liberal society by centralized, collectivized power—what he terms "the war society," driven by the rising power and expense of a hugely scaled military. "The centralization, and, increasingly, individualization of power is matched in the social and cultural spheres by a combined hedonism and egalitarianism, each in its own way a reflection of the destructive impact of power on the hierarchy that is native to the social bond," he writes. Nisbet offers no prophecy of inevitable decline; rather, he means to call attention to "the problem of finding the means of generating a social order within which the individual can live and derive a spirit of initiative."

263 + xv pages. Foreword, preface.

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McMurtry often falls back on hokey metaphor ("writing itself: what is it but a way of herding words?"), and despite his claims to have transcended his roots in prairie isolation, cowboying in this book often becomes the hammer that makes everything look like a nail.

Nonetheless, transcend his roots he did. There are good reasons why Texas has played such a negligible role in our national literature, and in telling the story of his youth McMurtry lays them out with a frankness that must have cost him something in Texas pride. Moreover, these reflections on growing up in a land without literature are quite inspiring. Even before television and the Internet, "cultural density" was a far more democratic commodity than Walter Benjamin ever dreamed of—welcoming even to a friendless boy in a bookless house in the middle of a sea of grass.

Fertility's Victims

The Baby Boon: How Family-Friendly America Cheats the Childless
by Elinor Burkett
Free Press. 256 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Kay S. Hymowitz

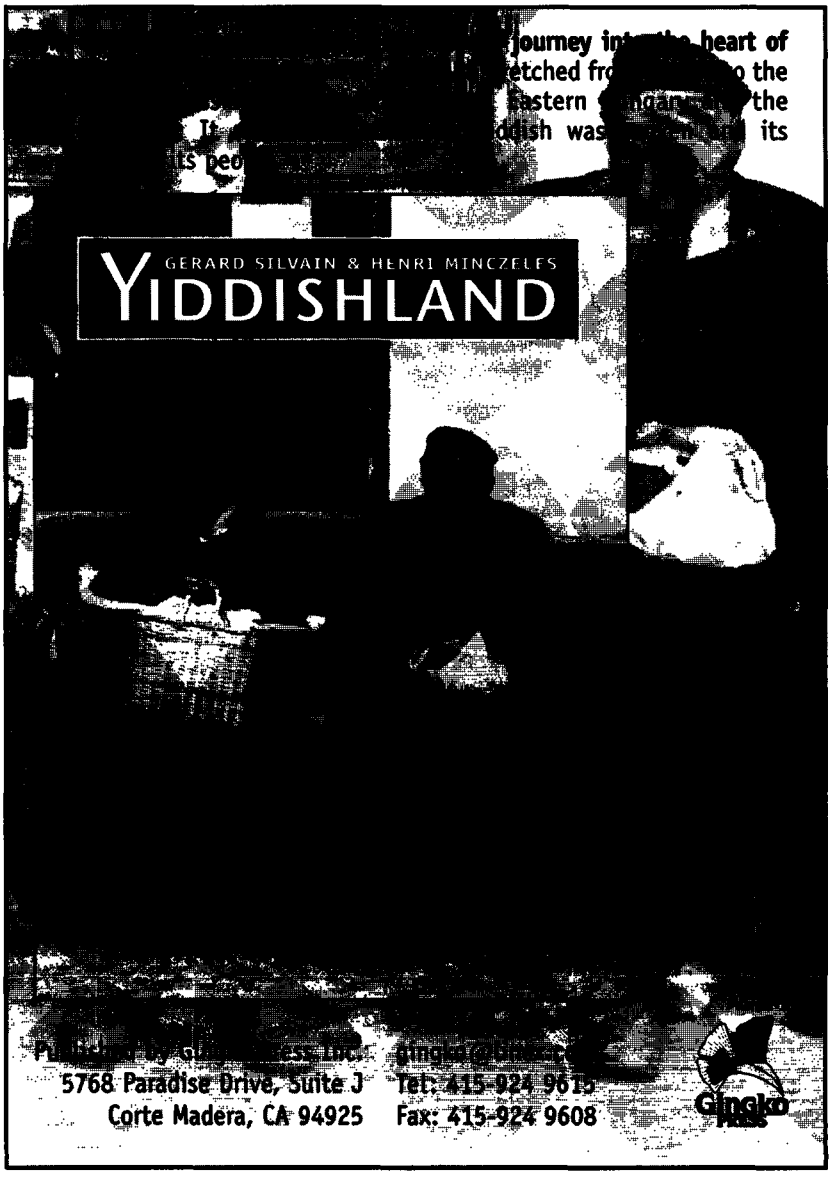
The American workplace has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past decade. In order to accommodate working parents—in particular, working mothers—many companies now provide their employees with generous maternity leave, day-care centers, flexible working hours, and time off for school functions. Still others offer such benefits as $1,000 gifts upon the birth of a new child, financial help for adoption, and interest-free loans for college tuition.

For the corporate managers who have brought about this transformation, as for the politicians who have encouraged it by word and legislative deed, such policies demonstrate their strong commitment to the American family. But for Elinor Burkett, a journalist who has specialized in criticizing feminism from within, the new "family-friendly" workplace points to something else entirely: a growing indifference to the needs and interests of those who have chosen to remain childless. *The Baby Boon* is meant to serve as a manifesto for this long-ignored and, we are told, increasingly disgruntled class.

As Burkett sees it, today's America consists of two distinct nations, one inhabited by parents and the other by the childless. Indeed, in her view, those without children—or the "child-free," as one of her interviewees proudly calls herself—are an oppressed minority, victims of a society run by self-involved baby-boomer parents.

Forced to endure a range of in-

Kay S. Hymowitz *is a contributing editor of* City Journal *and the author of* Ready or Not: Why Treating Children as Small Adults Endangers Their Future—and Ours.



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dignities in their private lives—having to shop and dine in the company of minors is on their list of complaints—the childless are most put-upon, according to Burkett, at work. There they are expected to put in longer hours, to skip weekends and holidays, and to cover for colleagues whose parental responsibilities pull them away to confer with a teacher, attend a little-league game, or stay home with a newborn. Even more galling is the fact that the childless are the ones who ultimately pay for their employers' family-friendliness, since the expensive perks enjoyed exclusively by parents tend to depress wages across the board.

To make matters worse, parents show no gratitude for the special privileges they receive. They treat the childless with ill-disguised scorn and, filled with an invincible sense of entitlement, continually demand still more concessions to their family needs. One woman, Burkett relates, sued her employer for failing to provide a private room in which she could pump breast milk—a violation, she claimed, of both her civil rights and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Though a feminist herself, Burkett places much of the blame for this situation on contemporary feminism. Willfully blind to life's inevitable trade-offs, the movement's leaders have failed to speak common sense to women, instead promoting unchecked career advancement as the absolute right of every working mother. Those who do not toe the movement's line—like Joyce Purnick, the *New York Times* editor who recently scandalized a graduating class at Barnard by telling them that her own success had come about only because, being childless, she was able to give all her energy to journalism—risk ostracism from the fold. Their crime, according to feminist doyenne Betty Friedan: "pitting women against women."

Having come of political age in the 1970's, Burkett finds it ironic that a movement whose original appeal rested in large part on questioning the primacy of motherhood has now embraced "the maternal mystique," accepting motherhood as "the highest idea." Feminists may attempt to disguise this fact by speaking in the name of "parents" or "families," Burkett writes, but in reality they have simply imported into the workplace the "rigid female stereotype" that a woman is, above all, a mother. Little wonder, she archly observes, that in advocating "affirmative action" for mothers, feminists have often found themselves in league with the benighted conservative advocates of "family values."

The Baby Boon is a lively read—too lively, in fact, for its own good. Filled with overheated prose and exaggerated examples, it is the sort of book that may rally sympathizers but nevertheless leaves one wondering about its author's reliability.

Burkett is unconvincing, for one thing, in her effort to portray a simmering class divide in the workplace. After all, it is not just the childless who fill in when a parent takes time off from work—colleagues with grown children or with less urgent family concerns carry the load as well. Nor is it true, as Burkett asserts, that girls are now being taught "that women cannot be happy or fulfilled without children." To the contrary, the clear message being communicated to girls today is that they should set their sights on a high-powered career; marriage and motherhood are, at best, an afterthought.

Where Burkett does perform a useful service is in reminding us how much family policy in the U.S. has been transformed over the last generation—and how powerful are the forces working to accelerate the pace of change. In much of Europe (as many American feminists accusingly point out), all parents—and not just those working for progressive corporations—are given twelve months of paid leave when a baby is born, subsidized day care, and a generous allowance for each child. If the present trend holds—and there is no reason to think that American women will somehow stop wanting to "have it all"—this may be the shape of things to come here as well.

Unfortunately, Burkett is as ill-equipped to evaluate this change as are the feminists she criticizes. She, too, operates by a moral calculus based almost exclusively on the welfare of adults. If parents want to leave their two-month-old in day care for ten hours a day, that is okay with her so long as no one asks her to pay for it. Having children, Burkett avers, is simply another "lifestyle" choice, one that differs little from any other expensive hobby.

The unspoken and, to say the least, highly dubious assumption here is that whether children grow up at home with their mother, in the keeping of a nanny, or in one of the many institutions that now serve in loco parentis for working couples, they will somehow turn out just fine in the end. The resilience of this self-serving idea, not only among contemporary feminists but among critics like Burkett, suggests that despite the newfound "family-friendliness" of the American workplace, we still have a long way to go in recovering the most basic wisdom about the needs of children and families.

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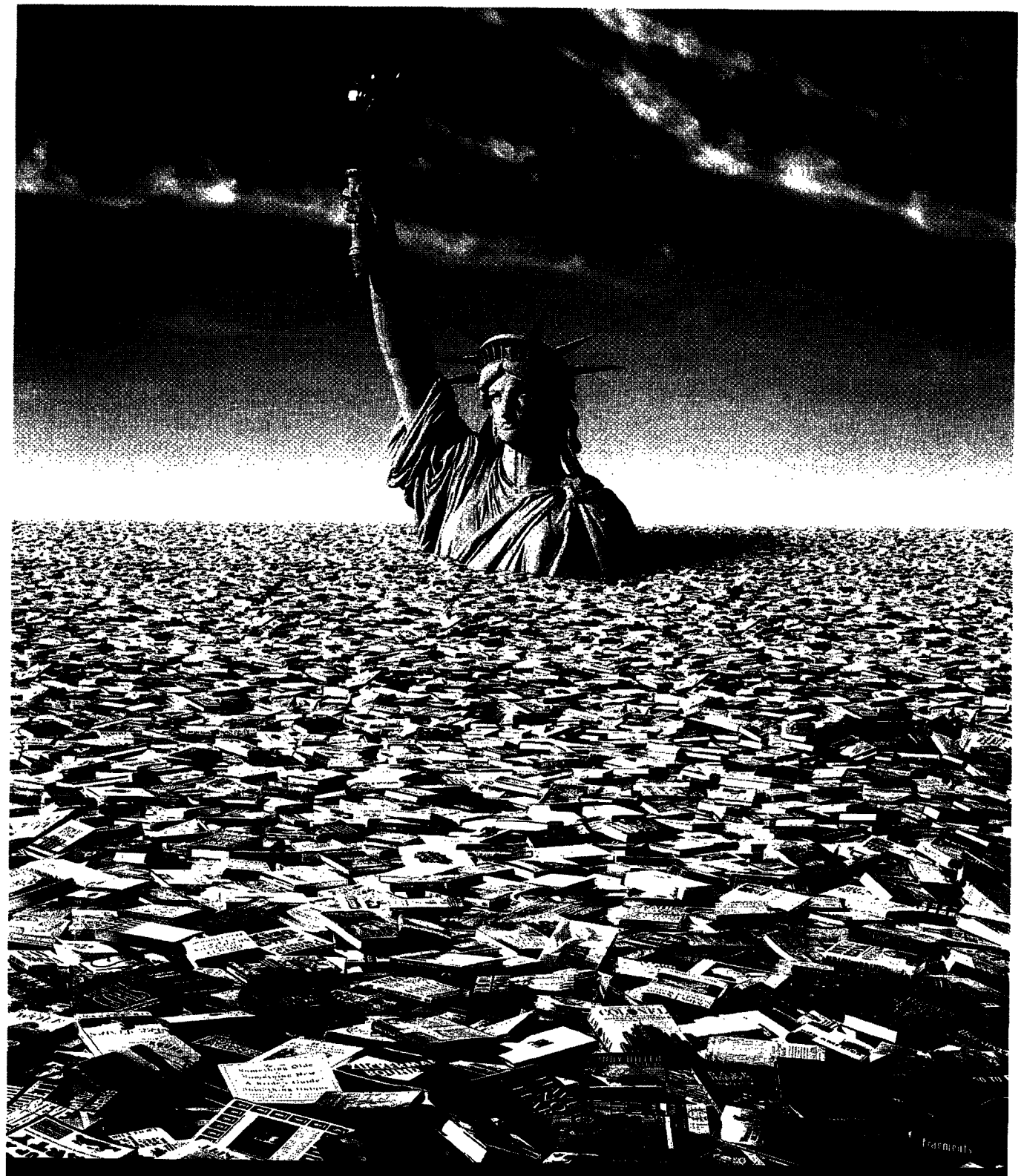

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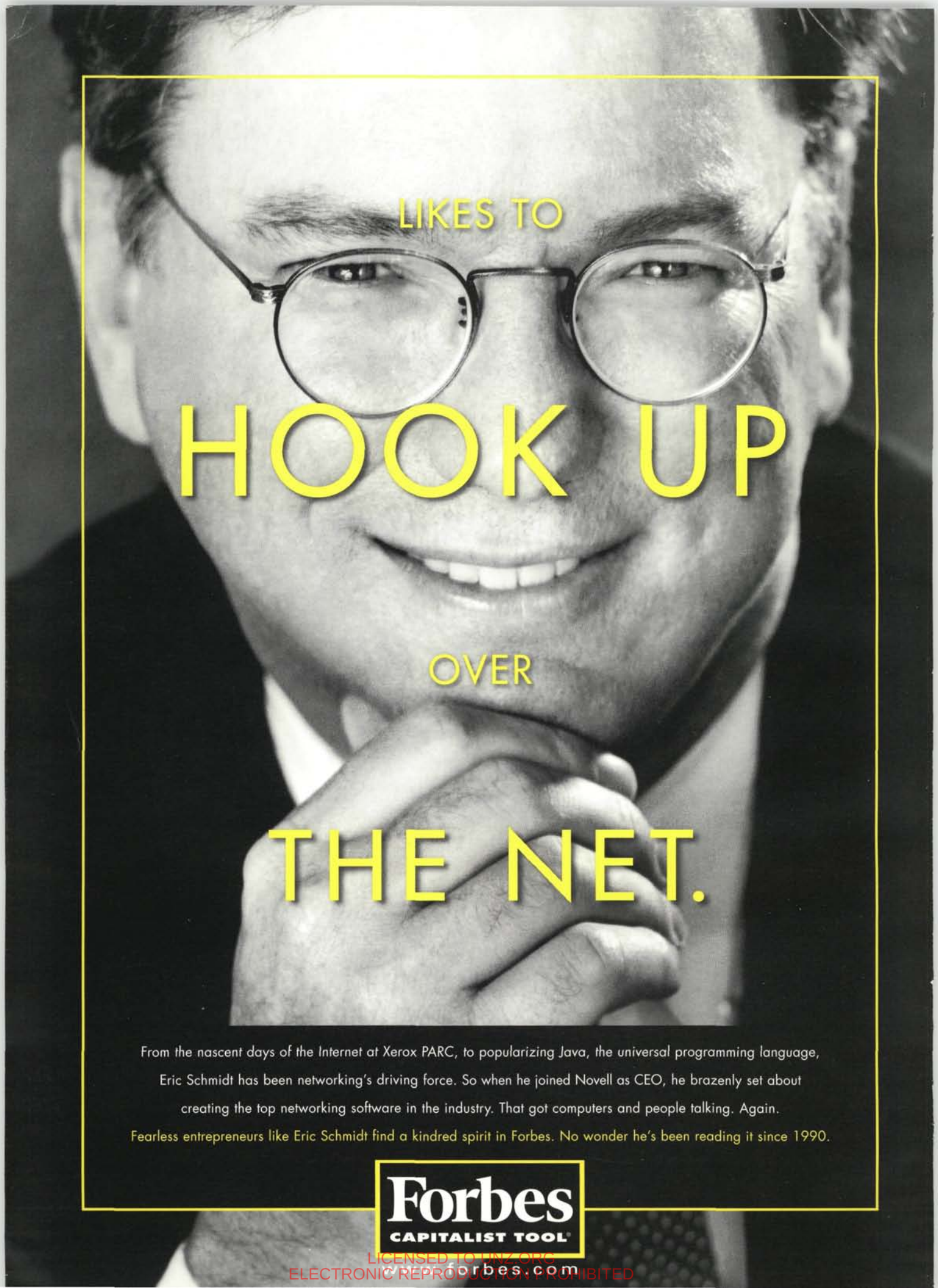

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